

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 19, 2019

PURISIMA TO THE SEA TRAIL PLANNING

Project No. 19-032-01
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$301,000 to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to prepare preliminary planning documents for a seven-mile extension of the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail on the San Mateo County coast.

LOCATION: Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, southern San Mateo County Coast.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Trail Corridor Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [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 an amount not to exceed three hundred and one thousand dollars (\$301,000) to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (“the grantee”) to prepare planning documents for a seven-mile extension of the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail and related parking area on the San Mateo County coast.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
 2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
 3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.
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In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and the requirements of all applicable federal and state laws governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities into 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 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."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends disbursing up to \$301,000 to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) to prepare planning documents for a seven-mile extension of the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail and related parking area on the San Mateo County coast. The proposed seven-mile trail extension will link to eight miles of existing trail that extend east through the District's 5,038-acre Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve to an existing segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail on Skyline Boulevard (see Exhibit 2). When completed, the 15-mile Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail will connect the Bay Ridge Trail to the 3.6-mile Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail, a segment of the California Coastal Trail. The trail will also serve to facilitate the longer-term vision for a Bay-to-the-Sea Trail, which will consist of approximately 40-miles of continuous east-west regional trails connecting the San Francisco Bay Trail to the Coastal Trail. Planning the proposed trail furthers a priority identified in the Conservancy's strategic plan that calls for the design of new regional trails that connect inland populations to the coast and open coastal areas that are currently inaccessible.

At its October 17, 2019 meeting, the Conservancy recommended 16 proposed projects for inclusion in the 2019 Priority Conservation Area (PCA) Grant Program, a program of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). PCAs are areas through-out the Bay Area that have been identified in Plan Bay Area 2040 as a priority for conservation and restoration due to their agricultural, natural resource, scenic, recreational, public health and/or ecological values and ecosystem functions. (Plan Bay Area 2040 is the regional 20-year planning document for the Bay Area prepared by MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments.) The PCA Grant Program is collaboratively funded by MTC and the Conservancy. Of the 16 projects recommended for funding in this round, 13 projects are being recommended for funding by MTC and 3 projects are being recommended for funding by the Conservancy, including the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail Planning Project.

The proposed Conservancy funds will be directed to the completion of several planning tasks including the development of a preferred trail alignment for the seven miles of new trail, conceptual designs for a parking area at or near Highway One including boundary and

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topographical surveys, and a study of options for a pedestrian crossing of Highway 1 that will include traffic analyses, line of sight analysis, safety and drainage improvements and permitting requirements. The scope of work will also include consultation with agencies and organizations and several public meetings to solicit public/stakeholder feedback on the preliminary plans. Once these tasks are completed the District will prepare final plans, permit applications and environmental review documents needed to secure the permits to construct the project.

Site Description: The proposed trail corridor runs through newly acquired lands that are part of the Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, which is owned and managed by the District. In the Preserve, the proposed trail will run from Skyline Boulevard westerly to Verde Road (Exhibit 2). From Verde Road to Highway One, the proposed trail will likely extend over privately-owned agricultural land through an existing trail easement owned by Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). With a crossing over Highway One, the Trail will connect to the Cowell-Purisima Trail.

Rising to a height of almost 1,200 feet, the project site possesses unparalleled views of the coastline and the western Santa Cruz Mountains and includes part of Lobitos Ridge, a prominent ridgeline extending from the District's 5,038-acre Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve west to the coastal lowlands, separating the watersheds of Purisima Creek to the north and Lobitos Creek to the south. This ridgeline is central to the open, rural landscape of the region and the views of the ocean and coastal terraces from the ridge are spectacular.

The project area is a mix of transitional coastal habitat; there are also portions of prime agriculture near Verde Road. Starting at the western margin of the redwood/fir forest, the coastal landscape dramatically changes from forest to grazed rolling grasslands, steep brushy canyons, fallowed crop land, and lush creek corridors that represent the great diversity of coastal San Mateo County. The lower elevations have a mix of native and non-native trees, coastal brush and grasslands. The area contains wildlife habitat for mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats and dusky-footed woodrats. Bird species frequenting the area include loggerhead shrikes, red-tailed, Cooper's, and sharp-shinned hawks.

Grantee Qualifications: The District has the capacity and expertise to complete the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail Planning project. The District has acquired and currently manages over 63,000 acres of public land across 26 preserves including 220 miles of trails. Currently, the staff includes over 175 employees across eight departments who regularly work with a variety of contractors that add additional capacity and expertise where needed, including project design and permitting. The District has an extensive history managing grant funding and for the past seven years has managed an average of \$1,200,000 in grants per year.

In June 2019, the District opened six miles of recreational trails at Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, a 1,432-acre preserve just outside of Los Gatos. These and similar projects, including the 3.5-mile trail at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve opened in 2018, demonstrate the District's capacity to plan, construct, and maintain recreational trail projects within its preserves.

Project History: For the past two decades the District has been actively working in partnership with POST to acquire the land necessary to complete the Purisima-to-the-Sea trail. In 2002 the

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Conservancy awarded funds to POST to acquire Purisima Farms Ranch to both protect the property's agricultural, open space, and natural resources as well as to provide the opportunity for future development of the Coastal Trail and the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail. The Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail was completed and opened to the public in 2011 with Conservancy funding. In June of 2019 Conservancy staff approved POST's transfer to the District of the remaining land rights needed to construct the trail, and in early 2019 the District contacted Conservancy staff to request funds for the trail planning project. Since then Conservancy and District staff have coordinated the development of their proposal. During this same time the District applied to MTC's PCA Grant Program for additional match funding for the project.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$301,000
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District	<u>\$72,000</u>
Project Total	\$373,000

One of the anticipated sources of Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code Section 75001 et seq. (Proposition 84). Section 75060 authorizes the use of Proposition 84 funds for several purposes including projects that promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state. Section 75060(b) specifies that projects undertaken with funds allocated to the Conservancy must be consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31000-31414). Proposition 84 specifically allocates a portion of Conservancy funding for San Francisco Bay and its watersheds, including those that drain to the San Mateo County coast (Public Resources Code Sections 75060(c)). The proposed Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail project will plan a trail and parking area that will enable the public to access and enjoy the coastal resources of San Mateo County.

The other anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000, Public Resources Code Section 5096.300 et seq. (Proposition 12). Proposition 12 funds may be used for projects that are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code and involve the acquisition from a willing seller, preservation, restoration, or enhancement of real property in coastal areas and watersheds or the development of public use facilities. Consistent with Proposition 12, the proposed project consists of planning for development of public use facilities, a trail and related parking area, pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

The District will provide in-kind services estimated to be valued at \$80,500.

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CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the coast.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for development of accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed project will plan a new trail to the coast that will serve local residents and workers as well as visitors from throughout the region and beyond. Both the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail and the District's nearby Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve draw visitors from throughout the Bay Area and the state.

Section 31400.2 authorizes the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of a public accessway by any public agency or nonprofit organization but requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with the section, the proposed amount of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, and the Conservancy's project selection criteria (See Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines). The recommended \$301,000 grant would provide 66% of the total planning costs that include the in-kind staff services.

Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed grant to the District will further these goals by planning a trail from an inland trail system to the coast that will connect to the Coastal Trail.

Finally, Section 31409 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants and provide assistance to public agencies to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail. The proposed project will plan a trail that will connect an inland trail system, the Bay Area Ridge Trail, to the California Coastal Trail.

As required by Section 31401, the Conservancy has adopted standards to guide agencies in developing public access to coastal resources. These are discussed relative to the proposed project in the "Consistency with Conservancy's Access Program Standards" section below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

As a condition of approval of this grant, the grantee will be required to design the trail to be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development. In particular:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: The project will be designed and located to: minimize alteration of natural landforms; be subordinate to the setting's character;

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prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety; ensure the privacy of adjoining residences; and d) protect environmentally sensitive habitats and agricultural areas.

Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location: The trail may be partially located on an access easement and will be no wider than necessary.

Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas: The project will be designed and located to minimize adverse impacts to environmentally sensitive resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project entails designing a trail and parking lot to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities and enable people to enjoy natural, cultural, and historical resources.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective E** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project entails the design of a new regional trail that connects inland populations to the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 13, Objective H** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project entails developing a plan for constructing a link between the Bay Area Ridge Trail and Coastal 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 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.
1. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By planning public trail and parking facilities the project serves to promote and implement the following state plans:
 - **The Coastal Act (1976), Public Resources Code Sections 30210-30214** on public access states that "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."
 - **Coastal Act (1976), Public Resources Code Section 30240** on environmentally sensitive habitat areas states that "environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values, and only uses dependent on those

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resources shall be allowed within those areas,” and “development in areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive habitat areas and parks and recreation areas shall be sited and designed to prevent impacts which would significantly degrade those areas, and shall be compatible with the continuance of those habitat and recreation areas.” The proposed project will be designed consistent with this section.

3. **Support of the public:** The project has support from the public, public agencies and elected officials as demonstrated by the letters attached as Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of San Mateo County.
5. **Need:** Without funding from the Conservancy, the project may not be completed in the foreseeable future.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Planning the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail will facilitate the longer-term vision for a Bay-to-the-Sea Trail, which will consist of approximately 40-miles of continuous east-west regional trails connecting Bay Area residents and visitors to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the Coastal Trail. Upon completion this regional network will connect 89 continuous miles of trail from mountains to the sea.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The proposed trail is not expected to be vulnerable to sea level rise because the project ends at Highway 1 which is located approximately 2000 feet away from the shoreline at an elevation of approximately 180 feet.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed preparation of plans for the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail project is statutorily exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report or negative declaration under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, section 15262, in that it would involve only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted or funded. The project is also categorically exempt from CEQA under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that will not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization.

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