

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
February 6, 2020

Houda Point Access Improvements

Project No. 19-058-01
Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$90,000 to the Trinidad Coastal Land Trust for construction of public access improvements, including restroom, picnic area, kiosk and bike rack, at Houda Point in Humboldt County.

LOCATION: Trinidad, Humboldt County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Site Plans](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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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 ninety thousand dollars (\$90,000) to the Trinidad Coastal Land Trust for construction of public access improvements at Houda Point in Humboldt County.

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.
 4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
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5. A recorded agreement pursuant to Public Resources Code 31116(d) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the Trinidad Coastal Land Trust 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 Houda Point Access Improvements 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 the creation of system of public accessways.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The Trinidad Coastal Land Trust is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code."
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$90,000 to the Trinidad Coastal Land Trust (TCLT) to construct access improvements at Houda Point in Humboldt County (see Exhibit 1: Project Location).

Houda Point, located just south of the City of Trinidad, is one of Humboldt County's most popular surf spots. Despite warnings about rocks and sharks it remains one of the most valued places to surf in the area. In addition, visitors from throughout the County, and tourists driving down the California Coast, often stop to enjoy the beach and enjoy stunning views of the California Coastal National Monument. TCLT purchased the Houda Point property with a grant from the Conservancy in 1983 and has successfully managed it for the public since that time. However, the steady increase in visitors to the site, combined with the age of the existing improvements, has resulted in the need to improve the site facilities. The proposed project will reduce natural resource damage related to public use of the site, provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, and provide long lasting access for the general public.

Specifically, the proposed project consists of construction of the following improvements on the bluff top:

- an ADA compliant portable toilet
 - an ADA parking spot and ADA compliant route to the overlook & picnic area.
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- a picnic area with concrete picnic tables
- Overlook improvements including concrete benches, table and repair of an existing rock wall.
- Kiosk and new signage for the park
- New trash receptacles
- Bike rack
- Revegetation and repair of currently impacted areas.

These improvements will bring the park up to current standards and help the TCLT continue their long-term stewardship of the site (see Exhibit 2: Site Plans).

Currently the absence of restroom facilities at Houda Point has led to direct impacts to the park and surrounding areas. The proposed restroom will clean up the area, making it more family friendly, and allowing small groups to enjoy the proposed picnic area. The overlook was rebuilt in 1991 to accommodate wheelchair access, but the rest of the site does not meet current accessibility standards. The current improvements are specifically designed to more effectively open the area up to a broad group of visitors by removing barriers to access.

Improvements to the bluff top will allow the TCLT to host more groups during their popular docent-led tours of the area. TCLT hosts weekend tours open to the general public which focus on the area's natural history as well vibrant bird life, and during the week they offer environmental education events for school groups.

Site Description: Houda Point is an eight-acre coastal property that has been owned and managed by the TCLT since 1983. It is located on the popular Scenic Drive, a county road that runs from Moonstone Beach in the South to the Trinidad Rancheria and City of Trinidad in the north (see Exhibit 1: Project Location). The site looks out on sea stacks which are part of the California Coastal National Monument. It also provides access to the beach which is popular for surfers, dog walkers, and visitors from out of the area.

The eastern edge of the property consists of a one-acre bluff top with an informal parking lot and a well-used overlook. From the edge of the bluff there are three existing trails which connect the bluff top to the beach. They were rebuilt by TCLT volunteers in 2019 and are now in excellent condition. Due to the dynamic nature of the beaches at the bottom of the bluffs, the trails need maintenance every spring. During the summer of 2019 TCLT also reworked the upper sections of the trail to keep them in good condition.

The improvements proposed under this authorization will be limited to the one-acre bluff top area, the gateway to the overall site.

Grantee Qualifications: The TCLT was established in 1978 and now has a staff of three and a dedicated group of volunteers supporting its mission. It was initially established to preserve the

coastline in and around Trinidad and now holds both easement and fee title properties that it manages for public access and conservation. TCLT operates more than 20 properties for public access. The properties are maintained primarily by volunteers and larger efforts are guided by staff. TCLT also has a docent led environmental education program which is partially funded by an Explore the Coast grant from the Conservancy. It was awarded the Bureau of Land Management’s 2018 Public Land Partnership Excellence Award, a national award recognizing exceptional support for interpretation, education, and public outreach programs. TCLT has the staff and ability to implement the Houda Point Improvements.

Project History: Houda Point was acquired by the TCLT in the early 1980s with a \$12,000 grant from the Conservancy. The first public access improvements took place in 1981 with a \$16,070 grant from the Conservancy. TCLT constructed trails to the beach, stone stairs at the bluff edge, and a small overlook. In 1993 the Conservancy awarded an additional grant of \$54,000 to address storm damage to the bluff edge as well as make the overlook wheelchair accessible. More recently, TCLT has been awarded two Explore the Coast Grants which have helped it develop a docent led public outreach program, which utilize Houda Point as well as other properties managed by TCLT. TCLT reached out to the Conservancy in the winter of 2018 to discuss making access improvements to Houda Point. After discussions with Conservancy staff and a visit to Houda Point, TCLT submitted a grant application in the fall of 2019.

TCLT tackled planning and permitting for the Houda Point Access Improvements over the last year. This includes working with an architect, having the area surveyed and submitting an application for a Coastal Development Permit. The Conservancy was then approached about funding construction of the improvements.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$90,000
Trinidad Coastal Land Trust	\$19,000
Project Total	\$109,000

Conservancy funds for the proposed project are expected to be derived from an appropriation pursuant to the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 (Proposition 12, Pub. Res. Code §§ 5096.300 et seq.). The funds will be those designated for projects north of the Gualala River and those designated for statewide projects. The Conservancy may use Proposition 12 funds to provide grants to government entities and nonprofit organizations, pursuant to Division 21, for the enhancement, restoration and development of coastal resources, beaches, waterfronts, and public accessways. (Pub. Res. Code § 5096.352(c)). Consistent with the purposes of these funds, the TCLT would use the Conservancy grant for coastal access improvements in Humboldt County under Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation.

The TCLT will provide additional funding for the project from its internal budget, and has covered the cost of site planning and permitting.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 et seq.) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop lands for public access to and along the coast. Section 31400.3 allows the Conservancy to provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of Division 21. TCLT, which will carry out the proposed project, is a private non-profit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. The proposed project consists of improving a public accessway to the coast. Accordingly, Conservancy funding of the proposed project is consistent with sections 31400, 31400.1, and 31400.3.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy for this project is based upon the amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the TCLT, the urgency of the project and the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines as described below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The TCLT has designed the improvements to be consistent with the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development." These include:

Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources: The project will increase the protection of coastal resources by focusing use on well-constructed trails, and through the installation of a bathroom.

Standard No. 9, Scenic Overlooks: The project will improve access to a popular scenic overlook.

Standard No. 12, Support Facilities: The project will provide new support facilities, including a restroom, trashcan, and bike rack and therefore make it easier to use this coastal accessway.

Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access: The project will improve barrier-free access by installing an ADA compliant restroom, parking spot, and trail to the overlook.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will enhance the opportunity for access for people with disabilities through the construction of an ADA-accessible parking spot, restroom, and pathways.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will fund the construction of a new picnic area which will enhance coastal recreational opportunities.

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 meets the goals of California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report. The project considered the effects of climate change and public safety when developing the plans. (Pg. 27, 5)

The proposed project meets Goal 1.11 from Safeguarding California (2018) in that it supports public access along waterways (Page 216). It also meets goal PC-1.11 in that it rebuilds a coastal accessway that will not be impacted by flooding and erosion.

4. **Support of the public:** See "Project Letters"
5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Humboldt County.
6. **Need:** The TCLT would not be able to undertake this project without funding from the Conservancy.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Houda Point is a well know spot for coastal access. It serves both locals who enjoy it daily, as well as visitors traveling along the California Coast.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project will not be damaged by sea level rise. The project location is a bluff top which is well above the sea level rise predicted by 2100.

Additional Criteria

9. **Readiness:** The grantee is ready to undertake the project in the summer of 2020.
10. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** The project is on a bluff top and may be subject to increased rates of bluff erosion due to the increasing

frequency and intensity of winter storms. However, the majority of the improvements are located back from the bluff edge and should not be damaged in the near future. Houda Point is a promontory which appears to be supported by rock which is less prone to erosion than nearby areas. There are a number of slides within a half mile of the site, but those slides are made up of rock and soil which is much less consolidated.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code Regs. Section 15303, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, which exempts the construction of new, small structures, and 14 Cal. Code Regs. Section 15301, which exempts repair of existing facilities and topographical features. The project is limited to revegetation and repairs to impacted areas of the existing public access facility, and construction of small structures that qualify for exemption under 15303, including street improvements (section 15303(d)) and small accessory structures (section 15303(e)).

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