

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 05, 2020

GAVIOTA COAST BEACH WHEELCHAIRS

Project No. 19-017-12
Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$4,200 to the California Department of Parks and Recreation to acquire new beach wheelchairs at three State Beaches along the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County.

LOCATION: Gaviota State Beach, Refugio State Park, El Capitan State Park, Santa Barbara County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [August 22, 2019 Staff Recommendation](#)

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 four thousand two hundred dollars (\$4,200) to the California Department of Parks and Recreation ("the grantee") to acquire beach wheelchairs for Gaviota, Refugio, and El Capitan State Beaches along the Gaviota Coast of Santa Barbara 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 work program, including a plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding, a plan for maintaining the beach wheelchairs, and a budget.
2. Evidence of any written agreements required to enable the grantee to provide and maintain the beach wheelchairs and associated storage at each applicable beach location, and to conduct any related outreach.

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 System of Public Accessways.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
-

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends authorization to provide \$4,200 to the California Department of Parks and Receptions (DPR) to acquire three beach wheelchairs for use at Gaviota State Beach, Refugio State Beach, and El Capitan State Beach. In August 2019, the Conservancy authorized \$112,154 for grants to 11 organizations to acquire beach wheelchairs for locations throughout the coast (Exhibit 2). In January, staff received an additional request for beach wheelchairs for use along the Gaviota Coast and evaluated the request based on the same criteria used in the 2019 grant round:

- The extent to which the project serves and increases recreational opportunities for persons with disabilities, seniors, and others who may have physical challenges accessing California beaches;
- The extent to which the project location needs new or additional or replacement beach wheelchairs and/or storage;
- The extent to which the beach wheelchairs will be easily accessible by users.
- Project description is clear and concise and budget is reasonable.

The three State Beaches along the Gaviota Coast offer both camping and day-use and serve approximately 400,000 beach visitors a year. There are normally beach wheelchairs available to the public at each of the parks; however, the current equipment has reached the end of its useful life and needs to be replaced. Storage facilities are available at each beach for the chairs. Members of the public can request use of the chairs at the entry kiosk, any lifeguard tower, or from the campground host.

Site Description: Gaviota, Refugio and El Capitan State Beaches are located along the Gaviota Coast of Santa Barbara County. The Gaviota Coast is largely undeveloped and characterized by tall bluffs interspersed with creek valleys and pocket beaches. All three of the State beaches offer both camping and day-use and are heavily used, especially in the summer.

Grantee Qualifications: DPR staff have managed and maintained the beach wheelchairs at these three State beach units for many years. The systems for storing, maintaining and accessing the beach wheelchairs are well established, and the chairs are used frequently especially in summer.

Project History: As specified in the August 22, 2019 staff recommendation, the Conservancy has provided funding to local governments and nonprofit organizations to acquire beach wheelchairs in the past. There are approximately 100 locations on the California coast with beach wheelchairs available for use by members of the public at no cost. In November 2018, the Conservancy assessed the need for additional and/or replacement beach wheelchairs along the coast and these findings were presented to the Conservancy in December 2018. Subsequently the Conservancy conducted a beach wheelchair grant round which was the subject of the August 22, 2019 authorization. DPR did not apply for beach wheelchairs at the Gaviota beaches at that time, but subsequently contacted Conservancy staff in January 2020. Staff evaluated the Gaviota beaches proposal based on the 2019 grant round criteria, and are now recommending it for funding.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$4,200
Project Total	\$4,200

The anticipated source of funding for proposed project is an appropriation from Proposition 12 specifically for projects in Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, or Santa Barbara Counties (Section 5096.352(c)(3)). Beach wheelchairs are public use facilities that promote public access to the coast, and the proposed project will take place in Santa Barbara County.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31400 – 31410 regarding public access to and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that it is the Legislature’s intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline, including San Francisco Bay. Through the proposed project, the Conservancy will play a primary role in increasing public access to the state’s coastline by funding beach wheelchairs at three sites along the Gaviota Coast, increasing public access and enjoyment of coastal resources.

Section 31400.3 provides that the Conservancy may provide assistance as 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 Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the PRC. The availability and accessibility of beach wheelchair equipment at coastal beaches is a related and necessary function to fulfilling the objectives of Chapter 9, which are to “effectively guarantee” the right of the public to access and enjoy coastal resources. Without beach wheelchair equipment, large segments of the California public would be unable to access and enjoy the coast.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The proposed project is consistent with Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access, of the Conservancy's Access Program Standards, which states that accessways that accommodate or plan to accommodate those with mobility problems are the highest priority for State funding.

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 expand or enhance opportunities for access for people with disabilities to and along the coast and coastal trails.

**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 provision of beach wheelchairs for people with disabilities supports the Conservancy, the Coastal Commission, and the Department of Parks and Recreation in efforts to increase accessibility of the California coast for people with disabilities. Section 30210 of the California Coastal Act states: "...maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people...".
4. **Support of the public:** Based on the research conducted in late 2018, the current usage of beach wheelchairs on the California coast, and previous of beach wheelchairs at the three Gaviota State Beaches, there is support for providing funds for beach wheelchairs.
5. **Location:** The proposed project will be located within the coastal zone Santa Barbara County.
6. **Need:** Without Conservancy funds, replacement beach wheelchairs likely would not be acquired at this time and thus beach wheelchairs would become unavailable at these three popular beaches.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Gaviota Coast State Beaches are visited by approximately 400,000 visitors and residents each year. Access onto the sandy beaches and to the ocean's

edge is difficult for people with disabilities. This grant program will serve both residents and visitors seeking access to the coast.

8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The beach wheelchairs can easily be relocated if necessitated by sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Readiness:** DPR has indicated that they are ready to acquire the beach wheelchairs as soon as funding is available.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, 14 Cal. Code of Regulations (CEQA Guidelines) Section 15301, which exempts the operation and minor alteration of existing structures, facilities and mechanical equipment involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The proposed project will replace beach wheelchairs that are in dilapidated condition and thus will not result in change in current use.

The proposed project is also exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15311, as accessory structures that are temporary use items in generally the same locations from time to time in publicly-owned parks and other facilities designed for public use.

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