

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 5, 2020

**CARRINGTON COAST RANCH MASTER PLAN WITH  
LOWER COST ACCOMMODATIONS STUDY**

Project No. 19-051-01  
Project Manager: Lisa Ames

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to Sonoma County Regional Parks to prepare a master plan addressing resource protection and public use, including a segment of the California Coastal Trail and lower-cost accommodations for the Carrington Coast Ranch in coastal Sonoma County.

**LOCATION:** 4300 Highway 1, Salmon Creek, Sonoma County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Maps](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Photographs](#)  
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 and Sections 31411-31414 of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to Sonoma County Regional Parks ("the grantee") to prepare a master plan addressing resource protection and public use, including a segment of the California Coastal Trail and lower-cost accommodations for the Carrington Coast Ranch property in coastal Sonoma 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.
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2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of the Conservancy.
4. To the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate into the master plan, 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."

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 Chapters 9 and 10 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access and lower-cost coastal accommodations, respectively.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines."

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#### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$150,000 to Sonoma County Regional Parks (Regional Parks) to develop a master plan for the Carrington Coast Ranch in Sonoma County. The proposed master plan will balance public use with resource protection and include a feasibility study to evaluate the potential for lower-cost overnight accommodations on the property. The historical coastal ranch presents an opportunity to develop up to 3 miles of California Coastal Trail (CCT) and 10-18 affordable campsites for public use on a previously inaccessible portion of the Sonoma Coast.

The 335-acre Carrington Coast Ranch sits at the junction of Highway 1 and Coleman Valley Road, north of Salmon Creek and the town of Bodega Bay (Exhibit 1). The ranch is a historic landmark with remaining elements of a dairy farm reflecting continued agricultural use over a period of more than 140 years. The property consists of gently sloping marine terraces that rise from west to east, sloping down along the southern boundary to where Salmon Creek cuts through the marine terrace. Sensitive species such as American badger, California red-legged frog, and Townsend's big-eared bat inhabit the coastal prairie and freshwater marsh habitats. The site's gentle topography along with spectacular coastal views generally lends itself to constructing accessible trails; the ranch has long been recognized by regional and state plans as a priority for protecting scenic and open space values and for completing a critical link in the CCT. Additionally, Carrington Coast Ranch was identified as a high opportunity project in the Coastal Conservancy's *Explore the Coast Overnight - An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal*

*Accommodations.* The property is easily accessible for school field trips and is served by public transit.

The Sonoma County Agriculture and Open Space District (District) acquired the Carrington Coast Ranch in 2003 with the intention of transferring it to California State Parks. With Conservancy funding, State Parks completed an Immediate Public Use Facilities Plan (IPU) in 2011 that evaluated the site's natural, cultural, and scenic values; public recreation needs; site characteristics and constraints; and regulatory, management, and operational issues. The plan identified a range of options for recreational uses and facilities and recommended appropriate public uses and facilities consistent with the protection of resource values. Due to budget constraints, State Parks was unable to accept the property transfer. Fortunately, Sonoma County Regional Parks (Regional Parks) has the demonstrated capacity to own and manage the property and monitor future improvements. The District will transfer the property to Regional Parks in Spring 2020 and provide funding for initial public access as match funding for this project.

Utilizing State Parks' IPU Plan as a baseline document, Regional Parks will complete a Master Plan for the Carrington Coast Ranch. The master plan will include a resource management plan balancing public use with resource protection of the property, design of public access amenities, and designs for a multi-use segment of the California Coastal Trail. The planning project will also include a lower cost accommodation feasibility study to evaluate a location previously identified as potentially appropriate for 10-18 campsites; this includes assessing water, sanitation, and management needs. The Master Plan will include preliminary plans and cost estimates needed for seeking future construction funding.

**Site Description:** The 335-acre Carrington Coast Ranch, designated as a historic landmark in 1982, is located on the Sonoma coast, approximately two miles north of Bodega Bay adjacent to State Highway 1 and the Sonoma Coast State Park (Exhibit 1). The property includes intact coastal prairie, rolling hills to the east, rock outcroppings and remaining elements of a historic dairy farm. Remaining historical buildings include the original homestead house (circa 1860 or earlier), tank house (circa 1870), milk house (circa 1930), poultry house and carpenter's shop that exhibit assorted levels of damage from age, weather and vandalism. Additionally, four historical cypress wind breaks are found on the property, two to the south and two to the north of Coleman Valley Road. These mature Monterey Cypress trees provide a sheltered interior area. Sensitive species such as American badger, California red-legged frog, and Townsend's big-eared bat are found on the property. The location on the ranch that will be evaluated for potential campsites is less than half of a mile from the coast.

Carrington Coast Ranch could provide up to 3 miles of an undeveloped link in the California Coastal Trail connecting to existing recorded trail easements and offering expansive views of the ocean, Bodega Bay, and the Salmon Creek estuary from the coastal terrace.

**Grantee Qualifications:** Regional Parks successfully operates a network of parks with camping facilities and public access trails throughout Sonoma County and hosts over 2 million visitors

along the spectacular Sonoma coast each year. Regional Parks has completed numerous coastal planning and implementation projects with public input and Conservancy support, and currently manages coastal regional parks and accessways from Bodega Bay to Gualala Point, including Doran Beach, Pinnacle and Shorttail Gulches, Stillwater Cove, Sea Ranch coastal access trails and Gualala Point.

**Project History:** The property was used for dairy operations by the Genazzi family from 1877 until the late 1940's and then by the Carrington family, who leased the property for ranching and residential use. Because of its location, scenic vistas, open space, natural resources, and potential for recreational access and trail connections, the Carrington property was acquired in 2003 by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District (District) with the intention of transferring the property to California State Parks as an addition to Sonoma Coast State Park. In 2004, the Conservancy helped fund a collaborative effort by the District, LandPaths and State Parks to perform site-cleanup, secure the existing historic buildings and begin the planning process for the property. State Parks completed the "Carrington Ranch Immediate Public Use Plan" in 2011. Due to State Parks' staffing and budget constraints, Regional Parks offered to accept and manage the property and is partnering with the District on project funding options. The property transfer from the District to Regional Parks is planned for spring 2020.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>
<b>Sonoma County Regional Parks</b>	<b>\$215,000</b>
<b>Sonoma County Regional Parks Foundation</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>Sonoma County Ag and Open Space District</b>	<b>\$225,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>

The expected source of funds for this project is the FY 2019/20 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code Sections 80000-80173). Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 (section 80120-80121) allocates funds to the Conservancy to enhance and protect coastal and ocean resources and to grant funds to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for development of lower-cost coastal accommodations. (Public Resources Code Section 80120(b)).

Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project consists of planning for public use balanced with resource protection and for the development of 10-18 new camping sites on the Sonoma coast. The project would be carried out in accordance with Chapter 10 of Division 21 regarding lower-cost coastal accommodations (see "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section below).

Regional Parks is providing \$215,000 from the county's Parks Measure M fund; the District has committed \$225,000 of Initial Public Access funding for the project; and Sonoma County Regional Parks Foundation has committed \$10,000 for the overnight accommodations feasibility study.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

This project is undertaken pursuant to Chapters 9 (Sections 31400-31410) and 10 (Sections 31411-31414) of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

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 along the coast that will serve local residents and visitors from throughout the region and beyond. Bodega Bay draws visitors from throughout the Bay Area and the state.

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 Regional Parks will further these goals by planning for a 3-mile segment of the 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.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31412(a), which states that the Conservancy may award grants and undertake projects as part of its Lower Cost Coastal Accommodations Program (Explore the Coast Overnight) to facilitate the development of new lower cost accommodations within one and one half miles of the coast. The project will plan for the development of 10-18 new camping sites on Carrington Coast Ranch.

Consistent with Section 31412(c)(1), the proposed project was selected through a collaborative effort with Sonoma County Regional Parks and Sonoma County Agriculture and Open Space District. Because the project involves campsites that will be owned by a public entity, they will be lower cost relative to other private facilities in the area. Also, future development based on this project will serve the nearby disadvantaged communities of Sereno del Mar, Carmet and Salmon Creek.

Pursuant to Section 31413, the Conservancy's implementation of the Explore the Coast Overnight Program must be guided by a lower-cost accommodations assessment. The Conservancy completed the "Explore the Coast Overnight - An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations" (Assessment) on March 14, 2019. The proposed project will plan for

an increase in overnight options on the Sonoma Coast at Carrington Ranch, a location identified as a high opportunity project in the Assessment.

**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:** In siting future trails, the Carrington Coast Ranch Master Plan will - a) minimize the alteration of the natural landforms and match the character of the local landscape and d) protect the property's environmentally sensitive coastal terrace habitats that support the Townsends big-eared bat, badger and red-legged frog.

**Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The proposed master plan will ensure that trails are designed to avoid adverse effects on the wetlands and riparian areas and if possible, enhance these areas.

**Standard No. 8, Trails:** The proposed master plan will design trails to provide continuous public access along a coastal bluff connecting access easements.

**Standard No. 9, Scenic Overlooks:** Where appropriate, the master plan will include scenic overlooks accessible to those with physical disabilities.

**Standard No. 12, Support Facilities:** The proposed master plan shall include support facilities for the Carrington Coast Ranch including signs, trash receptacles, restrooms and campgrounds.

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

Consistent with Goal 1, Objective C of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will design a new three-mile segment of the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with Goal 2, Objective B, the proposed project will plan for the opening of coastal areas that are currently inaccessible or closed to public use.

Consistent with Goal 2, Objective C, the proposed project will design facilities such as picnic areas, parking lots, restrooms and natural play spaces to increase and enhance coastal recreational opportunities and enable people to enjoy natural, cultural and historical resources.

Consistent with Goal 3, Objective D, the proposed project will plan for 10-18 campsites - lower cost overnight accommodations along the coast.

**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:**
  - **California State Wildlife Action Plan (2015)** - Freshwater marsh is one of the North Coast's priority habitat conservation targets. Freshwater marsh covers approximately 33 acres of Carrington Coast Ranch and the extensive grasslands provide upland habitat support. One of the species supported by this conservation target is California red-legged frog, which is documented on the property. Development of appropriate habitat management within the Master Plan will help meet the pertinent habitat conservation goals.
  - **California Essential Habitat Connectivity Strategy for Conserving a Connected California (CDFW, Caltrans 2010)** - Carrington Coast Ranch is in the Essential Habitat Connectivity Corridor that traverses north-south through Sonoma County, in an area of moderately high importance. In addition, it is mapped as one of the "Important Natural Areas Small"—an area that qualifies as a natural landscape block but is too small to be prioritized for statewide connectivity corridors. The intent of this identification is that local planning will connect natural small areas. The proposed project includes preparing a Master Plan that will guide protecting and balancing the land's connectivity needs with human connectivity including the California Coastal Trail.
  - **US Fish & Wildlife Service Recovery Plan for the California Red-legged Frog (2002)** - Carrington Coast Ranch has extensive, quality habitat for California red-legged frog. By acquiring the land, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District has already implemented the following actions of the recovery plan: Action (1) - Protect known populations and reestablish populations and Action (2) Protect suitable habitat, corridors, and core areas. The proposed project will go directly toward implementation of Action 3) by developing a management plan for preserved habitat, occupied watersheds, and core areas.
  - **Completing the California Coastal Trail (2003)** – The proposed project will plan to implement Action 4 for Sonoma County to "provide safe pedestrian access separate from State Highway 1 through the extension of the Kortum Trail between the Sonoma Coast State Beaches units at Wright's Beach and North Salmon Creek Beach."
  - **Explore the Coast Overnight Assessment (2019):** Consistent with the Goal 1 of the Explore the Coast Overnight Assessment, the proposed project will help develop new lower cost coastal accommodations within one and one half miles of the California coast

by planning for 10-18 new campsites at the Carrington Coast Ranch, a high opportunity project identified in the Assessment.

- **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 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.
4. **Support of the public:** See Project Letters (Exhibit 3).
  5. **Location:** The project is located within the coastal zone of Sonoma County.
  6. **Need:** Funds are needed to plan public access to the property balanced with protecting its natural, scenic, and cultural resources. If no funds are received from the Conservancy, access will be delayed, potentially allowing degradation of the natural and historical resources on the property as it is currently used without structure or management. Public and private camping opportunities near Bodega Bay are frequently booked and additional low-cost camping is urgently needed along the coast. With too few opportunities, this property has sometimes been the target of unauthorized camping.
  7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project will design a new section of the CCT, a statewide objective. Additionally, the project will plan for developing 10-18 new lower cost accommodations to serve the great diversity of California’s residents.
  8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** While most of the property will not be affected by sea level rise, the southern boundary is along Salmon Creek in the tidally influenced zone. There are currently about 10 acres of freshwater marsh that are likely to become part of the estuary with sea level rise of 5-6 feet anticipated by 2100, increasing transitional habitat for the tidewater goby that lives there. The Master Plan will address freshwater habitat retreat to maintain critical freshwater habitat for California red-legged frog. By increasing the area of both freshwater and saltwater marsh, the land could contribute to carbon sequestration, per the California Climate Adaptation Strategy. The Park, campground, and Coastal Trail are all anticipated to still be in use in 2100, so facilities will be planned and sited where they are not in conflict with the changes generated by the rising sea. The project may also consider future public access to the ocean from the property as part of the Master Plan and environmental process in response to climate change when the lower Salmon Creek Beach access is inundated.

#### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.



10. **Innovation:** While planning needed to open this stretch of the California Coastal Trail has been a priority for years, this project will address not only the existing conditions but also anticipated changing conditions. Regional Park's experience with and increased understanding of fire risk in the area, park and trail amenities such as puncheons and bridges will be planned for construction using rock or other fire-stable material, to allow fire to burn through as is ecologically appropriate. In addition, the presence of Townsend's big-eared bat roosting in a historical structure on the property allows an innovative way for Regional Parks to approach public education. These bats are sensitive to human intrusion into their nesting places, so Regional Parks will plan to install a wildlife camera viewing the maternal care area. The public will be able to access streaming video of the bats along with information on the special status of the bat and learn the importance of not walking into caves or buildings where they are roosting.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See "Project History" above.
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** One of the climate risk vulnerabilities identified for grasslands, savannah, scrub, and some forest types in Sonoma County is increased fire likelihood arising from longer, higher temperature dry seasons producing greater evapotranspiration, resulting in dryer vegetation by the end of the drought season. Regional Parks is planning for this by planning fire-resilient park infrastructure and may consider controlled burns. Other vulnerabilities will be identified during the master planning process funded by the grant.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed preparation of plans for the Carrington Coast Ranch 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 will 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 approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.