

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 5, 2020

**ANTONELLI POND ALL-ACCESS TRAIL AND AMENITIES**

Project No. 20-001-01  
Project Manager: Fanny Yang

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$130,000 to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to prepare designs, plans, permit applications, and environmental review documents for an all-access trail and improvements to associated visitor-serving amenities at Antonelli Pond located in the City of Santa Cruz in Santa Cruz County.

**LOCATION:** Antonelli Pond, City of Santa Cruz

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)  
Exhibit 3: [Support 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 one hundred thirty thousand dollars (\$130,000) to The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (“the grantee”) to prepare designs, plans, environmental review analysis, and permit applications for an all-access trail and associated amenities at Antonelli Pond in the City of Santa Cruz.”

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.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County 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 trail designs for the Antonelli Pond All-Access Trail and Amenities 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 System of Public Accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Land Trust for Santa Cruz County 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 the Conservancy authorize a grant of \$130,000 to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County ("LTSCC") to prepare designs, permit applications, and environmental review documents for a 0.65 mile all-access trail, meeting the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), along the eastern, southern, and western sides of Antonelli Pond. Trail design will include improving visitor-serving amenities such as adding a path from the proposed main trail to the shoreline, putting a slip-resistant surface over the wooden platform and staircase steps, adding signs and interpretative displays, and providing a wheelchair-accessible picnic table. Antonelli Pond is owned and managed by LTSCC, and the Coastal Conservancy holds an access easement over the path along the eastern side of the pond.

Currently, the earthen paths along the east and west sides of Antonelli pond are unpaved, and some trail segments are too narrow and uneven for comfortable walking. In addition, portions of the trail are steeper than allowed under ADA standards. On the southern border of the pond (see Exhibit 1), there is no safe or formal trail connection between the west and east sides and no sidewalk along Delaware Street. As a result, pedestrians must walk in the street to connect to the two sides of the open space area. In addition, several of the amenities at the project site, including the picnic area and fishing platform, do not currently comply with ADA standards.

Improving the paths around Antonelli Pond will allow easier maneuverability for people with disabilities, families with young children, people using strollers, seniors, and bicyclists and will enhance recreational opportunities for visitors to bird watch, fish, and participate in other interpretive/outdoor education programs. In addition, the Antonelli Pond trail connects to Natural Bridges State Beach to the south, west to the U.C. Santa Cruz Seymour Center, and

north to the Santa Cruz County Coastal Rail Trail. Given the location of the proposed project, the trails at the pond could be a link for pedestrians and bicyclists to these various points of interest.

The proposed project would redesign the existing pathways to correct slope, width, surface material, and other factors to ensure compliance with ADA standards. The design will provide at least one ADA accessible route of travel to the edge of shoreline to allow direct contact with water for fishing. LTSCC will ensure that other access amenities, such as the picnic tables, are renovated to meet ADA requirements. In addition, LTSCC will work with the City of Santa Cruz to extend the sidewalk along Delaware Street to begin to address the existing pedestrian safety problem and connect the east and west pond trails. The project will also design a connection from the all-access trail to the Coastal Rail Trail via the railroad trestle to the north of the pond.

LTSCC will prepare designs, plans, conduct environmental review, and prepare a permit application for the improvements at the pond. Designs will emphasize shoreline access, connection of the proposed trail to the Coastal Rail Trail, and upgrades to existing amenities including signage, interpretative displays, wooden staircase, fishing platform, and picnic tables to be replaced or built to ADA specifications. To gather input on project design, LTSCC will hold community outreach and engagement meetings with neighbors and the general public during the design development stage. LTSCC will also work with the City of Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCRTC) in regard to the Delaware Street improvements and rail trail connection, respectively.

**Site Description:** LTSCC has owned and stewarded the 20-acre Antonelli Pond property since 1989. The site is located in the west side of the city of Santa Cruz between Delaware Avenue and Highway 1. Fed by Moore Creek, the project area includes Antonelli Pond and the adjacent riparian woodland, shrub areas, a freshwater marsh and grassy areas. Over 125 species of birds, five different reptile and five amphibian species are located on the site, as well as over fifteen species of mammals. The site offers scenic ocean views from several locations.

The pond is flanked by Natural Bridges State Park to the south and Moore Creek Preserve to the north. The land directly adjacent to the western side of the pond is currently used for farming by the Homeless Garden Project Farm and is expected to eventually be converted into housing as part of a proposed community development. The northern edge of the pond is marked by a railroad trestle which separates the current trail path from the Coastal Railroad Trail and Highway 1.

The pond is currently maintained weekly and undergoes annual resource maintenance projects through a Routine Maintenance Agreement between LTSCC and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The agreement allows for ongoing restoration work and removal of invasive plants without additional permits from CDFW. Additionally, Antonelli Pond is part of LTSCC's new park host program, which designates an on-site volunteer who monitors the pond daily and performs visitor service and maintenance duties around the site.

**Grantee Qualifications:** LTSCC has a long history of protecting, caring for, and connecting people to natural lands in Santa Cruz County. Since its establishment in 1978, LTSCC has protected over 15,000 acres of land. With an annual operating budget of \$3 million dollars, the

nonprofit is financially equipped to handle ownership and management responsibilities over their properties. Having received prior State grants, LTSCC is well-versed in meeting State grant requirements.

LTSCC will rely on both on in-house staff and contracted consultants to manage the Conservancy grant and carry out the proposed planning project. It is also expected that LTSCC will be responsible for any future trail construction, maintenance, and management.

**Project History:** LTSCC has a history of working with the Conservancy on various projects for the improvement of Antonelli Pond. In 1982, the Conservancy gave a grant to the LTSCC to acquire the pond and surrounding lands and to develop and implement an interim access plan, interpretive program, and long-term volunteer stewardship program. Through another Conservancy grant in 1986, LTSCC made initial improvements to the pond which included an unpaved walking trail, addition of a fishing platform, wooden stairway and benches, park host site, informational signs and irrigation to help with the establishment of native plants.

In 2001, the Conservancy accepted an offer to dedicate a public access easement to and along the eastern shoreline of Antonelli Pond. In 2018, the Conservancy’s ADA Transition Plan identified areas of the easement in need of accessibility improvements. The Conservancy contacted LTSCC about this report, and LTSCC proposed a larger project to improve access and accessibility at the site.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$130,000</b>
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County	\$25,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$155,000</b>

The anticipated source for the 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 75001 *et seq.* (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote access to the coastal resources of the State and are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Section 31000 *et seq.* Proposition 84 specifically allocates Conservancy funding for protection of Monterey Bay and its watersheds, which under Section 75072.5, are defined to include rivers and streams in Santa Cruz county. (Public Resources Code Section 75060(e).) “Protection,” as defined in the Public Resources Code Section 75005(m), includes “actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and includes acquisition, development, restoration, preservation and interpretation.” “Development” is defined in the Public Resources Code Section 75005(f) to include physical improvement of real property; “interpretation” is defined to include visitor serving amenities that increases understanding and enjoyment of natural resources.

Consistent with these provisions, the proposed project will design physical improvements and visitor serving amenities at Antonelli Pond, including an all-access trail around Antonelli Pond to increase accessibility for people with disabilities and others, a pond shoreline access trail, improvements to existing wooden stairs, signs and interpretative displays, a replacement picnic table, and slip resistant surfaces for the wooden platform and staircases to prevent slippage.

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, as discussed in the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section below. The proposed project is thus consistent with the funding requirements of Proposition 84.

LTSCC will provide \$10,000 in in-kind services through volunteers who will partake in the operations and maintenance of the proposed trail and amenities.

#### **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. Public Resources Code, Section 31400 states that it is the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy play a principle role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will play a primary role in increasing public access to the state's coastline by funding design and planning for an all-access trail connecting pedestrians and bicyclists to coastal access points.

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 Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project will further these goals by completing design and planning, environmental analysis, and permit application for the proposed all-access trail and visitor serving amenities located near the coast.

Section 31409 states that the Conservancy may award grants and provide assistance to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to establish and expand inland trail systems linking to the California Coastal Trail. The proposed project will create a regional connection from inland areas of Santa Cruz by linking the Coastal Rail Trail through Antonelli Pond to the Coastal Trail segment segmented located at Natural Bridges State Beach.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:**

**Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources:** The proposed trail and associated amenity improvements will be designed on top of the existing earthen path to minimize alteration of the site while preserving and enhancing natural resources.

**Standard No. 2, Correct Hazards:** The proposed project will correct hazards of the current unpaved path along Antonelli Pond by designing upgrades to a non-slip hardscape surface and ADA compliant slope and width. The improvements will be designed to create a safe, accessible

route of travel around the pond for people with disabilities, families with young children, strollers, seniors, and bicyclists.

**Standard No. 3, Access Easements: Construction and Location:** The proposed trail will average six feet in width and will be designed in compliance with the requirements of Title 24 of the California Administrative Code, as well as the requirements of other federal, state and local laws governing access for person with disabilities.

**Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The proposed project will be reviewed for impacts to environmentally sensitive areas and will be designed to minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive areas if necessary.

**Standard No. 8, Trails:** The conceptual trail design will provide continuous public access along Antonelli Pond while acting as a link from the Santa Cruz Coastal Rail Trail to coastal access points.

**Standard No. 12, Support Facilities:** The proposed project will include design improvements to existing signage, picnic tables, wooden staircase, fishing platform, and shoreline access.

**Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access:** The proposed all-access trail and amenity improvements will be designed to meet the requirements of Title 24 of the California Administrative Code, as well as the requirements of other federal, state and local laws governing access for persons with disabilities.

**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.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective C** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will improve existing visitor-serving amenities at a natural resource area, Antonelli Pond, including wooden staircase, fishing platform, picnic tables, and shoreline access.

**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 serves to promote and implement the goals of several state plans including:
  - Completing the California Trail (2003), the strategic plan prepared by the Coastal Conservancy, in consultation with the California Coastal Commission, the California Conservation Corps and State Parks, pursuant to Senate Bill 908 of 2011; the proposed project promotes “create[ing] linkages to other trail systems and to units of State Park system...to increase accessibility to coastal resources from urban population centers” (page 9).
  - Safeguarding California Plan: 2018 Update, roadmap showing how California’s state government is taking action to respond to climate change, laying out policy recommendations and overarching strategies recommended by the California Natural Resources Agency; the proposed project furthers policy recommendations by supporting public access to waterways, lakes, rivers, and parks.
  - Coastal Act (1976), Public Resource Code Section 30210 on public access and recreation for “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.”
4. **Support of the public:** The proposed project is supported by the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County Commission on Disabilities, the Regional Transportation Commission, Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, State Assemblyman Mark Stone, and others. See project support letters in Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** The proposed project is located within the coastal zone of the City of Santa Cruz.
6. **Need:** Without Conservancy funding, the proposed project will potentially be delayed for several years or not occur at all.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** Antonelli Pond is one of the few freshwater environments that can be enjoyed by the public in the Santa Cruz area. However, there is also continued demand for coastal access in Santa Cruz County and beyond. The proposed project will link people in the region to the coast while expanding recreational activities at the pond.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project site has an elevation of 39 feet and is therefore not vulnerable to sea level rise.

#### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
10. **Readiness:** The LTSCC is ready to start and complete the project in a timely manner.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
12. **Cooperation:** The Land Trust is working with both the City of Santa Cruz and RTC on the design and implementation of part of the project as discussed in the Project Summary.

**13. Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The proposed planning and design project will not result in any significant production of greenhouse gas emissions as it involves only planning and design activities. LTSCC staff is located in the City of Santa Cruz and will not have to travel far to visit project site; community engagement meetings will be held locally. Designs of the proposed trail will be anticipated to include elements that mitigate climate change such as using a trail-based material like Granitecrete that eliminates the heat island effect to which other hardscape treatments may contribute.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed preparation of designs, plans, environmental review documents and permit application for the Antonelli Pond all-access trail and related amenities is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15262, in that it involves only planning studies and feasibility analyses for future actions. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. 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.