

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
May 05, 2020

**MALIBU BLUFFS CAMPGROUND**

Project No. 19-055-01  
Project Manager: Rodrigo Garcia

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$500,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority to prepare plans, designs, environmental review documents and a public works plan for a campground and associated amenities at the Malibu Bluffs in the City of Malibu.

**LOCATION:** City of Malibu, Los Angeles County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31411-31414 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) (“the grantee”) to prepare plans, designs, environmental review documents and a public works plan for a campground and associated amenities at the Malibu Bluffs in the City of Malibu.

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.”

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 10 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to prepare plans, designs, environmental review documents and a public works plan for a campground and associated amenities at the Malibu Bluffs in the City of Malibu for the purpose of increasing lower-cost coastal accommodations in California.

One of the biggest barriers for low and middle-income Californians to accessing and enjoying the coast is the lack of affordable overnight options. Nearly 60% of Californians never spend the night when they visit the coast. For Californians earning less than \$25,000 per year, that figure leaps to 75% (“Explore the Coast Overnight – An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations,” State Coastal Conservancy, 2019).

The proposed project will help expand coastal camping in Southern California through the planning and design of a new campground, Malibu Bluffs Campground, potentially containing 50 campsites ranging from platform tent cabins/yurts to pop-up tent campsites. If constructed, the Malibu Bluffs Campground would nearly double the number of campsites in the City of Malibu, which receives 15 million visitors annually. The Explore the Coast Overnight Assessment found a high demand but little inventory of low-cost accommodations in this area.

In addition to these overnight accommodations, the proposed project will also include designs for day-use public amenities including three publicly accessible restroom structures, two parking lots, designated picnic areas and tables, improved trail alignments, and interpretive signage throughout the campground.

Tasks involved with the project include preparation of design documents, geotechnical studies and analysis, grading plans, a conceptual and schematic design package, a Public Works Plan and an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The Public Works Plan will be prepared in lieu of a coastal development permit application. The Public Works Plan and EIR will address both the Malibu Bluffs project and access to the Ramirez Canyon Campground; the tasks associated with including Ramirez Canyon Campground in the Public Works Plan and EIR are not a part of the proposed project.

If construction of the campground is completed after this project, MRCA will make the sites available to the public for a fee and will also provide low- or no-cost camping programs to foster youth, a program that is being developed with the help of previous Conservancy grants.

An example includes the Coastal Camping at Puerco Canyon project funded by the Conservancy's Explore the Coast Program from 2015 to 2018, where MRCA and Community Nature Connection worked with other partners to provide camping programming at Puerco Canyon. The program provided the venue, camping gear, supplies, transportation, and interpretive naturalists to facilitate the experience of camping and enjoyment of coastal resources at no cost to over 200 participants throughout the project.

**Site Description:** The project site is located on coastal bluffs directly above Amarillo Beach in the City of Malibu and consists of an 81-acre property owned and managed by MRCA. The project site is bounded by the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) on the north, Malibu Road on the south, Malibu Bluffs Park on the east, and a private residential property on the west. The proposed camping areas are on the bluff-top surrounded by coastal sage scrub and chaparral. The site also features sweeping views of the California coast and Santa Monica Bay from Palos Verdes to Point Dume.

Visitors can currently access the site from Malibu Bluffs Park, through trail connections along PCH, and from Malibu Road. Visitors can access the beach from the site through five public coastal accessways located along Malibu Road. The project will include potential designs for additional access to the site that may be established by two driveways and parking areas along PCH.

The site is centrally located to several natural and visitor-serving attractions. Less than five miles away are thousands of acres of open space and extensive trail networks in the 154,000-acre Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). Visitors are also a short drive from Malibu Lagoon State Beach where they can view dozens of native bird species and the estuary habitat. Additionally, the site is in close proximity to Malibu's Surfrider Beach, the Adamson House, and the Malibu Pier.

**Grantee Qualifications:** MRCA is a local government public entity and is a joint powers authority comprised of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. MRCA manages more than 75,000 acres of parkland owned by it or SMMC. MRCA is dedicated to the preservation and management of local open space and parkland and to ensuring public access to these lands. MRCA has successfully managed several grants from the Conservancy for different purposes consistent with the Conservancy's goals. Most recently, the Conservancy awarded a grant to MRCA to acquire approximately 23 acres of Ramirez Canyon to provide direct access to a multi-benefit campground and protect sensitive habitat.

**Project History:** Over the past several years, the site has been identified as a high priority site for coastal camping. It was listed in the California Coastal Plan of 1975 as an ideal location for the "development of beach support facilities including inexpensive overnight lodgings." (California Coastal Plan 12-1975, p. 394). Subsequent to adoption of the Coastal Plan of 1975, the State purchased the project site and transferred it to SMMC.

In 2010, SMMC and MRCA analyzed the construction of a campground and trailhead project on the 81-acres Malibu Bluffs property in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the

Malibu Parks and Public Access Enhancement Plan – Public Works Plan. MRCA is currently considering modifications to the original parking and camping improvements site plan to increase the number of parking stalls and overnight camping accommodations originally proposed and to tailor the site to achieve their programmatic goals to bring under-resourced youth to the coast. A portion of the proposed project will update the 2010 FEIR to analyze these proposed changes to the campground design.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>
California Coastal Commission (In-Lieu Development Fees)	\$500,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</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, in particular, to grant funds to the public agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop lower-cost coastal accommodations. (Public Resources Code Section 80120 (b)).

Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project consists of developing plans to create 50 lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast through the construction of a campground. 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).

MRCA also has in-lieu funds received in connection with the Coastal Commission’s approval of an Amendment to the City of Malibu’s Local Coastal Program (LCP) enabling residential development of a parcel adjacent to the Malibu Bluffs Park. On August 12, 2015, the Coastal Commission approved the City of Malibu Local Coastal Program Amendment No. LCP-4-MAL-14-0408-1, which allowed development of single family residences on a vacant 24-acre parcel adjacent to the Malibu Bluffs Park, formerly known as the “Crummer Trust” parcel, and now commonly called “Malibu Coast Estates.” As part of obtaining Commission certification of the LCP amendment, the owner of the Crummer Trust parcel agreed to pay \$4,000,000 (following another amendment) to MRCA for use in developing lower-cost visitor accommodations. The Coastal Commission and MRCA originally agreed to use the funds for Puerco Canyon but later amended their agreement to allocate the remaining funds, approximately \$3,430,000 to develop lower-cost accommodations at Malibu Bluffs. MRCA will use these funds to construct the campground and operate campground programs.

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

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 10 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31411-31414. Pursuant to PRC Section 31412(a), 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 lower-cost accommodations within one- and one-half miles of the coast.

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Explore the Coast Overnight program because it will plan the construction of 50 lower-cost accommodations. The proposed campsites would be developed on the bluff-tops a short walk from Amarillo Beach and feature sweeping views of the California coast and Santa Monica Bay from Palos Verdes to Point Dume. Visitors can currently access the site from Malibu Bluffs City Park to the east, and trail connections along PCH to the north and on Malibu Road to the south.

Consistent with Section 31412(b), MRCA plans to operate the campsites on a reservation basis to the general public at overnight rates comparable to nearby Leo Carrillo State Park which are approximately \$60/night and far less expensive than other accommodations in the area. The excess revenue generated during a nine-month season will be used to cover staffing and operating costs associated with a no-cost camp programming that will serve under-resourced populations and foster youth from across Los Angeles County similar to other programs funded by the Conservancy.

Consistent with Section 31412(c)(1), the proposed project was selected through a collaborative effort with California State Parks and the California Coastal Commission.

Consistent with Section 31412(c)(2), community outreach has begun and will be continued through the EIR process.

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 provide an increase of overnight options in the City of Malibu, a location identified in the Assessment as having low concentration of lower-cost coastal accommodations in a county with high occupancy rate for coastal accommodations.

**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 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 coastal resources.

Consistent with **Goal 3, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will design and plan 50 units (campsites) of lower-cost coastal accommodations.

**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:**

Explore the Coast Overnight – An Assessment of Lower-Cost Coastal Accommodations (2019): Consistent with the goals of the Assessment, the proposed project will help create lower-cost coastal accommodations within one and one half miles of the California coast by planning the construction of a 50 site campground in the City of Malibu. More specifically, the proposed project is consistent with the following goals of the Assessment:

Consistent with **goal 1**, the proposed project will help develop new lower-cost coastal accommodations within one- and one-half miles of the California coast.

Consistent with **goal 3**, the proposed project will ensure that accommodations will be affordable and available to NGOs and public entities that support programs for youth or under-resourced populations by partnering with Community Nature Connection and the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services to provide camping experiences.

Consistent with **goal 6**, the proposed project will increase the stock of lower-cost coastal accommodations on coastal public land.

4. **Support of the public:** The project is broadly supported by Community Nature Connection, the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services, the National Park Service, California State Parks, Happy Trails for Kids, Peace 4 Kids, Pacoima Beautiful, the Los Angeles Audubon Society, and the California Coastal Commission who all expressed support for the construction of the campground at a stakeholder meeting held in December 2019 by MRCA.

5. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Malibu.

6. **Need:** If no funds were available from the Coastal Conservancy, MRCA would take the requested amount out of a fund reserved for the operations and management budget of the no-cost camping programming. Reducing that fund by \$500,000 would mean that MRCA would only be able to provide no-cost camping to low and middle-income youth for shorter periods of time.

7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Malibu Bluffs Campground will be of great regional significance due to the high need for lower-cost coastal accommodations in the City of Malibu's 21-mile long coast. Given the 15 million people that visit Malibu each year, this project has the potential to drastically increase the capacity of overnight accommodations while creating an opportunity for the public to access and recreate on one of the few remaining naturalized bluffs along the coast. This is especially true in a greater metropolitan area that is home to 19 million Californians. The Malibu Bluffs Campground project will also benefit and help enhance the existing coastal campground accommodations by reducing the demand on the two other nearest campgrounds at Leo Carrillo State Park and the privately-owned Malibu RV Park, both of which were severely impacted by the destructive Woolsey Fire in 2018.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project has an anticipated lifespan of 80 years, until approximately 2100. The anticipated sea-level rise for both 2050 and 2100 were estimated at the project site. Malibu Bluffs is east of Malibu road and a housing development. In addition, there will be a buffer between the edge of the bluff and this project. Malibu Bluffs has a maximum height of 180 feet above sea level (along PCH) and a low point of 33 feet above sea level (on Malibu Road); this project is not expected to be directly impacted by projected sea-level rise. However, the immediate region will be impacted by rising sea levels over the next century, including coastal access points adjacent to the project. Any vulnerability to sea level rise will be further studied in the EIR.

#### **Additional Criteria**

9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The proposed project provides an increase in lower-cost coastal accommodations for Californians, increased coastal access and increased recreational, educational and interpretive opportunities.
10. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Cooperation:** MRCA will work in close cooperation with Community Nature Connection and the regional offices of the Los Angeles County of Child and Family Services to provide no-cost camping experiences to low and middle-income youth.
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** Los Angeles County will likely be affected by climate change in the following ways: more severe droughts, more intense heat spells, increased and more severe fires, and loss of California's native biodiversity. The design of the proposed project will anticipate these changes and plans to mitigate them. Native plant landscaping will serve as new and enhanced habitat and open space for wildlife, increasing the resiliency of California's biodiversity. In case of fire or extreme drought in the western Santa Monica Mountains, the Malibu Bluffs open space will act as a reserve of food, water, and shelter to migrating species. The proposed project's design will also employ water conservation measures to improve the quality of water upon which wildlife depends. Increasing opportunities for rainwater to filter into the water table can reduce the risk of minor flooding, as well as increasing local water reserves. Furthermore, the interpretive landscape design, outdoor gathering space and interpretive

signs installed within the Malibu Bluffs Parks will promote environmental stewardship. They will teach the public about environmental issues and solutions and the area's natural resources and how people can play a role in improving the environment. The project will provide multiple-benefits to local flora and fauna, and most importantly, will improve the environment for community members while providing recreational amenities and lower-cost overnight accommodations to the broader public visit the Malibu coast.

- 13. Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** Staff does not anticipate this planning phase to result in the production of greenhouse gas emissions.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, Section 15262, because it involves only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. 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.