

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
January 21, 2021

COWELL-PURISIMA COASTAL TRAIL BRIDGE REPAIRS

Project No. 08-060-02
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$55,000 to the Peninsula Open Space Trust to repair and restore two bridges along the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail, south of Half Moon Bay, in coastal San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail, south of Half Moon Bay, coastal San Mateo County.

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
Exhibit 2: [Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed fifty-five thousand dollars (\$55,000) to the Peninsula Open Space Trust (“the grantee”) to repair and restore two bridges along the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail, south of Half Moon Bay, in coastal San Mateo 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.”

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. The grantee is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Conservancy staff recommends disbursing up to \$55,000 to the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to restore and repair two bridges along the north end of the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail in coastal San Mateo County (Exhibit 1). After nearly 10 years of wear and tear in a harsh marine environment, the two long bridges (170 feet and 130 feet) need restoration and repairs, including rust removal, surface repair, and repainting (Exhibit 2).

Opened to the public in the summer of 2011, the popular Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail extends over three miles along the coastal bluffs just south of Half Moon Bay. In 2005, the Coastal Conservancy awarded a \$3.4 million grant to POST to construct and operate this segment of the Coastal Trail. Approximately half of the trail is located on land owned by the Conservancy with the remainder on easements owned by POST. For the past several years POST has operated the trail with its own funds, though it is expected the County of San Mateo Parks Department will take on these responsibilities next year.

Evaluations of the bridges funded by POST concluded that rust and corrosion on both bridges has occurred predominantly on the coastal side of the bridges that are exposed to higher levels of marine moisture. While the damage is largely to the paint surface, in some locations rust has penetrated through the paint and damaged the steel. The evaluations confirmed that if not repaired the damage will exacerbate and compromise the structural integrity of both bridges and eventually make them unsafe to cross. However, it was determined the damage can be repaired by applying targeted treatments at specific corrosion sites and still maintain the long-term structural integrity of the bridges.

Site Description: The project site is part of the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail that is located in the Coastal Zone of unincorporated southern San Mateo County south of Half Moon Bay (Exhibit 1). The trail consists of a three-mile, multi-use accessible trail surfaced with base rock. The trails runs adjacent to irrigated and fallow agricultural fields, three agricultural ponds, grassland and coastal scrub habitat, several large drainages that flow towards the shoreline, and a perennial creek supporting riparian habitat. The project vicinity supports agricultural row

crops, livestock grazing, limited rural residential and improved open space/recreation uses. The topography of the project vicinity varies from gently sloping foothills and agricultural fields to the east, steeper slopes along the sides of the seasonal drainages and along the perennial Purisima Creek, and steep cliffs that descend to broad, sandy beaches and rocky points below the bluffs. A resident colony of harbor seals uses a haulout area located on a beach and rocky point below North Cowell Ranch.

At the north end of the trail, there is a parking lot and bathroom for Cowell Ranch Beach operated by State Parks. Visitors follow the trail to Cowell Ranch Beach southwest for about 0.5 miles before turning south on to the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail. The trail extends south for approximately three miles along the bluff edge over North Cowell Ranch and Purisima Farms, both owned in fee by a local farmer and his family. The portion of the trail adjacent to North Cowell Ranch is owned almost entirely in fee by the Conservancy. The trail corridor then crosses over Purisima Creek and onto the Purisima Farms property over easements held by POST. The trail then turns eastward, terminating at the south staging area near Highway One.

Grantee Qualifications: POST has managed the operation and maintenance of the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail and associated amenities since the trail opened in 2011. POST currently owns conservation and trail easements over the project area, as well as fee title and easement interests over thousands of acres of open space and agricultural lands on the San Mateo County coast. POST operates a fee title and easement monitoring program to monitor its holdings and enforce landowner compliance with the terms of their easements.

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

5. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section below.
6. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section below.
7. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:**
 - **Coastal Act (1976), Public Resources Code Section 30210** on public access and recreation calls 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." The proposed project is consistent with this section in that it will provide safe public access to the bluffs at the project site while protecting private property owner rights and natural resource areas from overuse.

- **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 bridge repairs will be completed consistent with this section.
8. **Support of the public:** This project enjoys the support of local and state elected officials, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations. See letters of support attached as Exhibit 3.
 9. **Location:** See the “Project Summary”.
 10. **Need:** Conservancy funds are needed to complete the proposed bridge repairs. POST has provided substantial funding to operate and maintain the trail for the past several years and does not have sufficient funding to complete the project without assistance.
 11. **Greater-than-local interest:** With the stunning views and relatively long length, the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail attracts users from throughout the region, and provides a spectacular coastal recreation opportunity for tourists from throughout the state and beyond.
 12. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project site is located at approximately 100 feet above mean sea level and will not be vulnerable to sea level rise for the foreseeable future.

Additional Criteria

13. **Urgency:** Evaluations of the bridges concluded that, if not repaired, the current damage to the bridges will exacerbate and compromise their structural integrity, eventually making them unsafe and requiring the trail to be closed until the repairs are completed. If the repairs are not made, ongoing damage will exacerbate and compromise the bridges’ structural integrity, eventually making them unsafe, and requiring the trail to be closed until the repairs are completed. Intervention now is the most cost-effective solution.
14. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section below.
15. **Readiness:** POST intends to start the repair work in early 2021 and complete the project within six months.
16. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Coastal Conservancy made a significant investment in the Cowell Purisima property, first with acquisition of the trail property and agricultural easements of the adjacent farm land, and then a \$3.4 million investment in the construction and management of the Coastal Trail segment. Completing the necessary bridge repairs will ensure the public is able to continue to safely access and enjoy the trail for years to come.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$55,000
Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)	<u>\$55,000</u>
Project Total	\$110,000

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to derive from appropriations to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code Section 75001-75090). Proposition 84, Public Resources Code 75060, authorizes the Conservancy’s use of these funds for the purposes of promoting access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state that are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation under Division 21. The proposed project will enable the public to continue to enjoy access to the coastal resources of San Mateo County.

Section 75060(c) allocates funding specifically for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165), and states that “not less than 20% of the funds allocated by this paragraph shall be expended on projects in watersheds draining directly to the Pacific Ocean.” The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21, as further discussed below in “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation.” The project is also located in an ocean-draining watershed of one of the nine counties in the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, so the project meets the requirements of Section 75060(c) of Proposition 84. In addition, POST will contribute approximately half of the cost of the repair, plus all of the costs for the ongoing operation and management of the trail.

POST is providing funds raised through private donations.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165, to address the natural resource and recreational goals of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Section 31162 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area to achieve specified goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Consistent with Section 31162(c), the proposed project will assist in implementing the policies of the California Coastal Act (Division 20 of the Public Resources Code) and local jurisdictions, including the adopted Local Coastal Plan of San Mateo County (LCP). The project is consistent with LCP Chapter 11, Recreation/Visitor Serving Facilities Component Section, Policy 11.24(a)(2) which establishes priorities for the expenditure of public funds on public recreation and visitor-serving facilities based on the level of existing development and need. Additionally, as required by Section 31162(c), this project would serve to maintain a public recreation and visitor-serving

facility so that visitors may enjoy the state's coastal open space resources, can be implemented in a timely way, includes matching funds from POST, and preserves benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented.

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the project will repair a deteriorating coastal access facility to ensure the public can continue to use it.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, section 15301, because it consists of repair of an existing public facility that involves no expansion of existing or prior use.

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