

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 21, 2021

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA CONSERVANCY PROGRAM: LAND CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Project No. 08-023-05

Project Manager: Shalini Kannan

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$130,000 to Bay Area Open Space Council to fill data gaps in the Conservation Lands Network through citizen science data collection events in severely disadvantaged communities.

LOCATION: Multiple San Francisco Bay Area Counties

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [September 29, 2016 Staff Recommendation](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Support Letters](#)

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 a grant of an amount not to exceed one hundred thirty thousand dollars (\$130,000) to Bay Area Open Space Council (“the grantee”) to fill data gaps in the Conservation Lands Network through citizen science data collection events in severely disadvantaged communities.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
 3. Bay Area Open Space Council 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 \$130,000 grant to Bay Area Open Space Council (BAOSC) to fill data gaps in the Conservation Lands Network (CLN) through citizen science data collection events in severely disadvantaged communities (SDACs). Collection and incorporation of this data into the CLN will facilitate the planning and implementation of future urban biodiversity acquisition and restoration projects by the Conservancy and the greater Bay Area conservation and planning communities.

The Conservation Lands Network (CLN) is a Bay Area-wide biodiversity conservation vision, regional strategy, and set of tools for protecting and restoring uplands habitats within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Cruz County. The CLN has been supported in part by Conservancy funding since its launch in 2011 through the recent CLN 2.0 update (Exhibit B). The CLN has been a priority for the Conservancy as it greatly expands the agency’s ability to implement the directive of Section 4.5 of its enabling legislation (Public Resources Code Div. 21) to “participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay area for the purpose of...[identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay area], and providing for broad-based local involvement in, and support for, the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.” The CLN provides the uplands element in the region’s three complementary planning documents, which also include the Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report (1999, updated in 2015) and the San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals report (2010).

The CLN 2.0 lacks sufficient information on biodiversity across urban habitats in disadvantaged communities. Without this data acquisition and restoration of significant upland habitats in these areas cannot be successfully planned and designed. This project fills that gap by leveraging the growing body of volunteer-contributed biodiversity information stemming from community science and iNaturalist. A joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, iNaturalist is a global online network of everyday people’s plant and animal observations that contributes to the biodiversity work of scientists worldwide. While the CLN focuses on rural areas, iNaturalist observers and observations tend to be biased towards high population-dense urban areas and public lands. Urban creeks are of particular interest for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program as they stitch together the baylands with the uplands, and stronger data in these areas is needed to plan future restoration and acquisition projects.

Partnering with California Academy of Sciences, BAOSC will plan for and conduct two Bioblitzes - events at which people gather, often in local parks and open spaces, to explore nature and make and share observations of the local flora and fauna. These events will be located along urban creeks in SDAC communities, and will be designed with community-based organizations (CBOs) as partners to optimize engagement of and benefits to communities who have historically been excluded from conservation efforts. In addition to providing invaluable data for local land management and research, the resulting strengthened CLN will reflect a more holistic picture of Bay Area biodiversity by including the assets and needs of previously underrepresented communities. With stronger data, the Conservancy can work to meet conservation needs in SDACs through future capital projects. Building grassroots partnerships for land conservation work in SDACs may also prime these urban communities for engagement with and ownership of future restoration projects in their own neighborhoods.

Aligned with the Conservancy's JEDI Guidelines adopted in September 2020, this project promotes partnerships with CBOs that serve frontline communities, which will experience the consequences of climate change disproportionately and early. This project meets these communities where they are by implementing the project within urban nature areas in SDACs.

The specific tasks proposed for funding under this grant include:

1. Conducting an analysis to identify two urban creeks in the Bay Area where there are: a) SDACs, b) opportunities for protection and stewardship of parks and natural areas, and c) data gaps in the Conservation Lands Network (CLN) and iNaturalist (see "Site Description" below).
2. Co-designing and convening two Bioblitz events at the selected sites, in partnership with local community-based organizations and land conservation organizations.
3. Addressing urban habitat data gaps in the CLN using the data gleaned from the two Bioblitzes and from any future observations in these areas.
4. Launching digital campaigns to encourage and facilitate community members making and sharing observations of target species on iNaturalist on their own time. These campaigns will make it possible for communities to collect meaningful data anywhere, especially in urban and bayland habitats and during shelter-in-place orders.
5. Compiling the outcomes, outputs and lessons learned from the data collection and analysis into a Storymap (which will include maps and narrative to share project results) and a white paper, which will be shared on the CLN's website (bayarealands.org) and social media to enable use of the project by entities involved in planning acquisition and restoration projects.

Incorporating novel data from SDACs into the CLN enhances the CLN's utility for informing and promoting projects in urban watersheds of the Bay Area.

Site Description: The project will identify two Bioblitz locations in the nine-county Bay Area. These locations will be prioritized based on analysis of the data nexuses with urban creek and stream habitats suitable for CLN target species, the locations of SDACs, and the potential

partnerships with community-based organizations serving those communities. Initial analysis is shown in Exhibit 1.

Grantee Qualifications: Bay Area Open Space Council is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and a large and diverse coalition of 65 indigenous tribes, nonprofits, and public agencies in the Bay Area working together for climate resilient lands – including lands that are natural, working, rural, and urban. BAOSC and its members, including the California Academy of Sciences, are uniquely positioned to work across urban-rural lines, disciplines, jurisdictions, and scientific frameworks in order to design tangible solutions to the climate threats our region faces today. Members also share a commitment to improving equity outcomes in the region as a parallel priority to ensuring resilient lands for all. The project team is ready to tap into the diverse and broad expertise of BAOSC to meet the objectives of this project.

BAOSC is in the process of transitioning to a new name, TOGETHER Bay Area. This is the result of a significant transition of the Bay Area Open Space Council, which was formed in 1990 and which has received multiple grants from the Conservancy over the past 15 years. The reformed organization is under the leadership of a director who has demonstrated the necessary experience with financial controls, budgeting expertise, and partner relationships to meet project requirements under a grant contract; in addition, she is well-versed in the purpose and development of the CLN.

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 below.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section below.
3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By providing data and information to land managers and the general public, BAOSC’s work supports a variety of state wildlife, water, and climate change management plans. In particular, this authorization would further the goals of the following plans:

“California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report” - The project advances the goal to “steward and protect natural and working landscapes” by prioritizing an urban-inclusive landscape-scale approach to conservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, and stewardship that accounts for multiple benefits for under-resourced communities.

“CA Climate Adaptation Strategy/Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk Plan” - The project fulfills the “biodiversity and habitat” goal by planning for the improvement of urban habitat connectivity, and by protecting climate refugia within urban areas of the Bay Area.

“California Water Action Plan CA Wildlife Action Plan” - The project supports the advancement of subgoals under “Goal 1: Abundance and Richness” and “Goal 2: Enhance Ecosystem Conditions.” The proposed project will help the Bay Area plan for climate change through the lens of biodiversity, by prioritizing urban nature and urban natural corridors supporting changing species dispersal.

“California Essential Habitat Connectivity Strategy for Conserving a Connected California” - The project advances recommended strategies of maintaining and enhancing functional connectivity across numerous roads, agricultural areas, and urbanizing areas.

4. **Support of the public:** Bay Area Open Council is comprised of 65 diverse coalition members, several of whom have written support letters which are included in Exhibit 3.
5. **Location:** See the “Project Summary” above.
6. **Need:** It is critical that the Conservancy continue to support making regional conservation plans (subtidal, baylands, uplands) as robust as possible, as they provide a scientific underpinning to project investments. If the project were not funded, an increased understanding of biodiversity across urban habitats would not be reflected in the CLN, and the Bay Area’s ability to address climate change and social inequities would not be as strong as it could be.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** This project has regional significance because the outcomes and outputs will better enable the Bay Area’s conservation community to protect and steward urban biodiversity while meaningfully engaging underrepresented communities. While the specific project locations will be local, the results feed into a regional conservation strategy. In addition, the methodology and lessons learned can be applied to other geographies throughout the region. BAOSC’s members are nonprofits, Tribes, and agencies within the nine counties of the Bay Area plus Santa Cruz County, and outcomes of the project will be shared with them.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project is itself not subject to sea level rise, but the CLN database that will be strengthened by this project includes data regarding vulnerabilities to future sea level rise and other impacts of climate change.

Additional Criteria

9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The project will address data gaps and enhancement of the CLN, engage communities that have traditionally been excluded from conservation planning, and share results with a diverse regional collaborative to gain further public support for regional conservation planning.
10. **Innovation:** BAOSC seeks to employ innovative, technology-based approaches such as the iNaturalist app to bringing the land conservation community together around joint stewardship, media, and conservation planning. This project also demonstrates a new partnership with Cal Academy, and integration of citizen science into the CLN framework.
11. **Readiness:** BAOSC's staff and partners at the California Academy of Science have experience with carrying out the partnerships, Bioblitz, and communications that will make this project successful. They are ready to begin work in early 2021.
12. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project Summary” above.

13. **Cooperation:** This project is a unique partnership between BAOSC and the California Academy of Sciences and builds on many years of Coastal Conservancy investment in the CLN. A primary focus of BAOSC’s mission is to build cooperation among public agencies, tribes, and nonprofit organizations, and this project builds upon that strength to involve SDAC communities in conservation by working with CBO partners. Resulting data and an enhanced CLN are intended to guide future projects that meet the needs and wants of these communities.
14. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** While the proposed project does not entail physical improvements that could be vulnerable to climate change impacts, the CLN does provide detailed climate information, including site-level projections regarding climate change vulnerabilities, for use by local land managers, making it a valuable tool to identify impacts of climate change.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$130,000
Project Total	\$130,000

The anticipated source of funds are appropriations to the Conservancy from the “California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018” (Prop 68, Public Resources Code Division 46, Sections 80000-80173), in particular Chapter 9, which allocates funds for projects that enhance and protect coast and ocean resources including projects that are consistent with the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program at Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code section 80120(d)).

The proposed project is consistent with the funding guidelines for expenditure of Proposition 68 adopted by the Conservancy on December 6, 2018 (Guidelines). (See Public Resources Code section 80010). As described in the Guidelines, Proposition 68 requires that at least 15% of the total funds available under Chapter 9 be used for projects that serve severely disadvantaged communities (SDACs), defined as a community with a median household income less than 60 percent of the statewide average. (Sections 80002(n) and 80008(a)(2)). As stated in the Guidelines, the Conservancy interprets “serving” an SDAC to mean the project is located within an SDAC, located within a mile of an SDAC, or provides other benefits to an SDAC. The proposed project serves SDACs by filling habitat data gaps in these communities, engaging community members in biodiversity citizen science, soliciting community members’ input to guide future conservation actions in their neighborhoods, and enabling the planning of future acquisition and restoration projects in SDACs.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

This project is undertaken in accordance with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Under Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants within the Bay Area that achieve the following goals: (a) improve public access to, within and around the San Francisco Bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces; (b) protect natural habitats and

connecting corridors; (c) assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments and districts; and (d) promote and assist projects that will provide open space and natural areas accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes. The proposed authorization will provide funding that will allow BAOSC to undertake the planning that is necessary for the selection and implementation of projects within the Bay Area that achieve these objectives.

Section 31163(a) directs the Conservancy to cooperate with local and regional government bodies, non-profit organizations, and other interested parties in identifying and adopting long-term resource and recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Section 31163(b) directs the Conservancy to “participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area for the purpose of implementing subdivision 31163(a)”, and for “broad-based local involvement in, and support for, the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program”. The proposed authorization directly carries out these provisions by funding the work of BAOSC (comprising 65 public and non-profit entities) in refining priority areas for conservation (long-term resource goals) and generating diverse public support for protection of San Francisco Bay.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) in that (1) it is supported by a multitude of local and regional plans that call for coordinated action to protect open space and recreational opportunities for local and regional use, including the policies of county general plan open space elements throughout the region, policies and plans of local conservation districts, as well as regional conservation plans of entities such as the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG); (2) it serves a regional constituency –the nine-county Bay Area; (3) it can be implemented in a timely way because many project elements and all staff are already in place; and (4) it provides opportunities to articulate the need for habitat protection, land conservation, and public access benefits that could go unrecognized if the project is not quickly implemented.

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

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will help identify and prioritize resource and recreational goals by refining and filling gaps of the CLN, a regional conservation strategy.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project is located in disadvantaged communities and will benefit disadvantaged communities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

As set forth in California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15262, feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted or funded do not require preparation of an EIR or negative declaration. Further, basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not cause major disturbance to an environmental resource, such as the activities of this project, are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15306.

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