

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 27, 2021

BAY AREA RIDGE TRAIL: TWIN PEAKS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Project No. 20-049-01
Project Manager: Virgilio Cuasay

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$500,000, including \$74,000 in funds from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department to realign and improve the existing trail network at Twin Peaks in San Francisco County, part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment, to control erosion, increase public safety, restore native plants, and provide interpretive and directional signs.

LOCATION: City and County of San Francisco

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [Regional and Project Area Maps](#)
- Exhibit 3: [Photos](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Project Support Letters](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000), including \$74,000 in funds from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (“the grantee”) to realign and improve the existing trail network at Twin Peaks in San Francisco County, which is part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, in order to control erosion, increase public safety, restore native plants, and provide interpretive and directional signs (Exhibit [1](#)).

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 acknowledgment of Conservancy funding.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation 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 Conservation Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$500,000 grant, including \$74,000 in grant funds from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (RPD) for realigning and improving a total of 1226 linear feet of the existing trail network at Twin Peaks in San Francisco County, which includes sections of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, in order to control erosion, increase public safety, restore native plants, and provide interpretive and directional signs.

Twin Peaks is one of the most popular sites in San Francisco (City) and offers a rare 360-degree view of the City from its elevation of 922 feet. The Ridge Trail runs through the park and shares alignments with multiple segments of the larger trail Twin Peaks Trail System, including Segments 5 and 9 (Exhibit [2, red highlighted area](#)) which are being proposed for improvement. The park's network of trails links the Ridge Trail to the Creeks-to-Peaks trail network (Exhibit [2](#)) and provides access to the actual ridgeline.

Heavy use from both locals and visitors alike has caused wear and tear (Exhibit 3) on the trail system, leaving certain areas in a state of decline. Segment 9 (Exhibit [2](#)), the portion of the heavily used main trail spine, which runs between the northern (Eureka) and southern (Noe) peaks, was constructed 20 years ago by the San Francisco Conservation Corps. In areas where the alignment runs perpendicular to the steep grade (Exhibit [3](#)), visitors have opted for social trails that create erosion problems and threaten the area's natural resources. Eroded soils from these social trails also create slip hazards. Segment 5 (Exhibit [2](#)) was developed by volunteers in 2016 who wanted to create a better connection between Noe Peak and the Mission Blue Butterfly Trail by creating a rough switchback trail which moved trail users away from a hairpin turn on Twin Peaks Blvd. Due to lack of funding, this trail segment was not constructed with sufficient safety and access requirements.

Conservancy funding will be used to improve Segment 9, an official Ridge Trail alternative route for hikers, by replacing the existing deteriorating wood steps (Exhibit [3](#)) with longer-lasting box

steps, eliminating social trails, providing erosion control measures, restoring native plants, and providing wayfinding signage. Funding will also be used to regrade and realign the switchback on Segment 5, including installing box steps in appropriate areas. In addition to the potential ecological benefits of undertaking this work, visitors will be rewarded with safer access to the trail system. Retiring the social trails that have formed at both trails from poor design will direct visitors to stay on the path, avoiding road and terrain hazards.

Site Description: The project is located within the 20-acre open space area of the Twin Peaks, one of the most visited sites in San Francisco. At an elevation of 922 feet, the site features a 360-degree view of the entire city and surrounding areas, including the Marin Headlands, Angel Island, and the San Bruno Mountains. Fog regularly covers the area during summers, creating a range of microclimates for native plant and animal species (Exhibit [3](#)). Coastal sage shrub, coyote brush, California sagebrush, and sticky monkey-flower can be found scattered throughout the dryer, south-facing slopes. These shrub-rich habitat patches are home to the white-crowned sparrow, lizards, rodents, and coyotes. The seaward slopes are lush in comparison with elderberry shrubs, arroyo willow, *Dudleya* succulents, and coast rock cress. Salamanders, songbirds, red, and grey foxes can be found within this habitat. The ridge tops feature rocky grasslands which are home to three species of lupine that provide habitat for the federally listed endangered Mission Blue Butterfly. The 5,621 linear foot Twin Peaks Trail System is situated within this space. The Trail System aligns with the Bay Area Ridge Trail near the two peaks and gives hikers access coming from Mt. Sutro Open Space to the North and Stern Grove from the Southwest (Exhibit [2](#)). Creeks-to-Peaks Trail users coming from Glen Canyon Park have Southern access.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (RPD) is the grant applicant and is responsible for overseeing the operation of 220 parks and recreation facilities in San Francisco, including the Twin Peaks open space and trails. The RPD has an operations and capital budget of \$203.7 million and approximately 1,000 staff. The RPD has expertise in environmental planning, natural resource management, trail construction, habitat restoration, environmental education, and volunteer coordination. Since 2008, several trail projects have been completed in the City by RPD include the McLaren Park Connector Trail, Glen Canyon Trail System, the Creek-to-Peaks Portola and Mission Blue Butterfly Trails, and the Twin Peaks Eureka Peak among others.

Project History: The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 550-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC), and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public. Begun almost 30 years ago, over 390 miles of trail are now dedicated and/or open to the public in all nine Bay Area counties.

In 2011, a public engagement process brought about a detailed trail log that informed further action as part of the RPD's larger effort to improve the Twin Peaks Trail System. Optimal approaches to handle street crossings within the trail system were identified through input from the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and San Francisco Public Works. Ongoing

improvement efforts resulted in Bay Area Priority Conservation Area (Round 1) Grant-funded pilot road closure to the eastern side of the figure 8 roadway surrounding the two peaks. Now known as the Twin Peaks Promenade, this closure is slated to be converted to a linear park and share a primary alignment with the Ridge Trail. Lastly, RPD staff received input from the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Disability to improve accessibility standards. The proposed improvements will help achieve these goals.

At its March 27, 2014 meeting, the Conservancy recommended 13 projects, including a planning project for improving connectivity at Twin Peaks, for inclusion into Round 1 of the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) Grant Program, a program of the MTC collaboratively funded by the MTC and the Conservancy. Success from that effort prompted consideration for subsequent PCA grant rounds and on November 19, 2020, the Conservancy recommended 5 proposed projects, including this Twin Peaks Improvement Project, for the 2020 PCA Grant Program. PCAs are areas that have been identified in Plan Bay Area 2040 as a priority for conservation and restoration due to their agricultural, natural resource, scenic, recreational, public health and/or ecological values and ecosystem functions. Plan Bay Area 2040 is the regional 20-year planning document for the Bay Area prepared by MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments. The Bay Area Ridge Trail, which includes the proposed Twin Peaks Improvement Project, is designated as a Priority Conservation Area. This project will further the Conservancy's statutory and strategic goals of improving access around San Francisco Bay and is consistent with previous Conservancy authorizations to prepare trail construction plans and designs to support planning and implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

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:** The proposed project will construct a segment of the regional Bay Area Ridge Trail, which helps implement the following state plans:
 - **California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report** (Governor's Office of Planning and Research, November 2015): Goal 2, "Build Sustainable Regions that Support Healthy, Livable Communities," specific strategy to "support and invest in active transportation projects, such as walking and biking infrastructure."

- **California Recreational Trails Plan & Progress Report** (California State Parks, Phase I, June 2002, 2011): The Bay Area Ridge Trail is identified in the plan as a state trail corridor and meets the goal to “promote adequate design, construction, relocation, and maintenance of trails in order to optimize public access and resource conservation”.
 - **Plan Bay Area 2040** (Metropolitan Transportation Commission, July 2017): Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) are identified in the plan as regionally significant open spaces which have a broad consensus for long-term protection, but which face nearer-term development pressures.
4. **Support of the public:** Completion of the Ridge Trail is a regionally supported project spearheaded by the nonprofit Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC). This project is also supported by Walk SF, San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, San Francisco Department of Environment Biodiversity Division, the California Native Plant Society, and Nature in the City.
 5. **Location:** See the “Project Summary”.
 6. **Need:** The SFRPD has raised funds but needs additional funding from the Conservancy to complete construction of the trail.
 7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project will serve both San Francisco residents and visitors. Twin Peaks is a regional destination with a Ridge Trail section and an extensive trail network that connects multiple habitats, landscapes, and jurisdictions.
 8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Bay Area Ridge Trail is, by definition, to be aligned high on the ridgetops encircling San Francisco Bay. The proposed project will therefore not be vulnerable to sea level rise.

Additional Criteria

9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** Developing trails help address health issues by providing an opportunity for walking, running, or biking which can help increase activity levels. By providing access to multi-use trails, cyclists and pedestrians can avoid potential hazards through exposure to automobile traffic. Improving the trail reduces erosion and supports the restoration of endangered species habitat.
10. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Completion of the Ridge Trail is a specific objective of the Conservancy’s 2018 Strategic Plan and this authorization will advance construction of a heavily used trail segment. In addition, this authorization supports the Conservancy and MTC partnership to support protection and enhancement of Priority Conservation Areas.
11. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** With connections to BART and other regional trails, the planned trail segments will facilitate the use of non-motorized transportation around the region. Thus, providing funding will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the future.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$426,000.00
Metropolitan Transportation Commission (via Conservancy)	\$74,000.00
City of San Francisco	\$1,000,000.00
Project Total	\$1,500,000.00

Staff anticipate that \$426,000 for this project will come from the Conservancy’s FY 2019- 2020 appropriation from the “Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006” (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code Sections 75001-75103). Section 75060 of the Public Resources Code authorizes the use of Proposition 84 funds for several purposes including projects that protect coastal watersheds and projects that promote access to, and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state. Under Section 75005(m) the term “protection” includes actions to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources. Section 75060(c) specifically allocates funding for San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program projects consistent with Public Resources Code, Division 21, Chapter 4.5. The proposed project will protect and improve public access to coastal resources by improving safety of a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail and is consistent with Conservancy legislation (see “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section below).

The Bay Area Priority Conservation Area grant program requires a 2:1 match of the funds provided under the program. The City of San Francisco will provide \$1,000,000 in matching funds. This match will come from the City’s 2020 Health and Recovery General Obligation Bond, sourced from property tax revenue. Upon completion of the final design document, the City’s Trail Manager will determine if any proposed work can be completed with in-kind services.

The second source of funds will come from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s PCA Grant Program, funded through the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) program, and will be placed in a Conservancy special deposit account specifically for this project purpose.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Pursuant to Section 31162(a) of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may award grants for projects in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the bay, ridgetops, and urban open spaces through completion of the Ridge Trail system. Consistent with Section 31162(d), the proposed project will plan for trail improvements that will provide urban populations with access to natural areas for recreational purposes. The Twin Peaks Trail contains a segment of the Ridge Trail that provides corridors to open space in the middle of urban San Francisco. The trail is located entirely within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and is consistent with the rights of private property owners because the improvements are on publicly owned lands.

Consistent with Section 31163(a), in developing the Ridge Trail, and its spur trails, the Conservancy cooperates with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations to identify and adopt long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area.

Completion of the Ridge Trail is identified in (1) “The San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program Regional Needs Briefing Book (Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, July 1999)” and (2) “400 Miles and Beyond: A Strategic Plan for Completing the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, Draft 2006).”

The proposed project is a priority for Conservancy funding because it meets the funding criteria of Section 31163(c). The project (1) is supported by adopted local and regional plans, including the above mentioned Ridge Trail plans and MTC’s “Plan Bay Area 2040;” (2) is multijurisdictional/serves a regional constituency by enhancing Priority Conservation Areas, which are resources of regional significance, and by providing connections to BART that are accessible to the public via regional trails; (3) can be implemented in a timely way; (4) provides opportunities for benefits that could be lost if project planning does not continue; and (5) includes matching funds.

Participation in the PCA Grant Program leverages Conservancy funding with MTC funds and enables the Conservancy to “address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay area...in a coordinated, comprehensive, and effective way” (Section 31160).

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

Consistent with **Goal 13, Objective G** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct 1226 feet of the Ridge Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 13, Objective I** of the Conservancy’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will facilitate trail links between Ridge Trail Segments and the City and County of San Francisco’s recreational trail system.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The Twin Peaks Trail Improvement Project proposed for funding is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14 Section 15301 (“Existing Facilities”) in that it consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing public facilities and topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. Section 15301(c) cites the repair of existing pedestrian trails, and similar facilities as an example of activities exempt under this section.

Restoration activities under the proposed project are also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14 Section 15304 (“Minor Alteration to Land”) These activities consist of minor public alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees. None of these activities will result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.

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