

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 27, 2021

**Humboldt Bay Trail South Construction**

Project No. 19-052-01

Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$2,000,000 to the County of Humboldt to complete designs and permits and construct the Humboldt Bay Trail South, a new 4.25 mile stretch of the California Coastal Trail linking the Cities of Arcata and Eureka, and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**LOCATION:** City of Eureka and adjacent unincorporated area, Humboldt County

---

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Trail Components](#)

Exhibit 3: [Support letters](#)

Exhibit 4: [Initial Study, Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program](#)

---

**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 not to exceed two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to the County of Humboldt (“the grantee”) to prepare final designs and permits and construct the Humboldt Bay Trail South, a new approximately 4.25 mile stretch of the California Coastal Trail between the cities of Arcata and Eureka in Humboldt 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.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into landowner agreement(s) sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, monitor and maintain the project and protect the public interest in the improvements.
6. In addition, to the extent appropriate, the County of Humboldt shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development'.

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 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding as system of public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Humboldt Bay Trail South Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted by the California Transportation Commission on October 17, 2018 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 4. The Conservancy finds that the proposed project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces, or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects to a less-than-significant level, and that there is no substantial evidence based on the record as a whole that the project may have a significant effect on the environment, as defined in 14 Cal. Code Regulations Section 15382.

---

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$2,000,000 grant to the County of Humboldt to prepare final designs and permits, and construct 4.25 miles of Class I paved, non-motorized multi-use trail, completing the final section of California Coastal Trail between the cities of Arcata and Eureka. Staff also recommends adoption of the finding that the Mitigated Negative Declaration adequately addresses the potential significant adverse environmental effects of the project.

Construction of the Humboldt Bay Trail South will complete an important section of the California Coastal Trail and will also be a segment of the proposed Great Redwood Trail, both statewide priorities. Locally the project will connect Humboldt County's two largest cities and complete an important gap in the Humboldt Bay Trail (HBT). It will result in a 14-mile

continuous non-motorized trail from central Arcata to the southern end of Eureka (Exhibits 1 & 2: Project Maps and Trail Design).

In recent years, development of the Humboldt Bay Trail South project has been Humboldt County's top priority for active transportation and represents the greatest opportunity to enable a major mode shift in transportation within the county. The project is expected to significantly increase the number of non-motorized trips, improve safety, enhance public health, and promote community vitality.

The trail will follow existing railroad beds and trails on existing Right of Way (ROW) or properties owned or managed by the North Coast Rail Authority (NCRA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Caltrans, and the County of Humboldt. The Railroad ROW is in the process of being railbanked by the NCRA in order to protect use and ownership of the ROW and allow for it to be used as a trail. The trail itself will have a 10-foot wide paved, two-inch thick hot-mix asphalt surface with 2-foot wide shoulders and will be wide enough to accommodate two-way bicycle and pedestrian travel. The trail will include a center stripe delineating the directions of travel and associated regulatory, warning, and directional signs. Trail amenities will include viewing platforms, benches, and interpretive signage.

Approximately three miles of the trail will be constructed by widening the existing railroad prism and constructing the trail parallel to and offset from the rails, similar to the existing northern portion of the trail. For segments of railroad that have been damaged by flooding and erosion, the project will repair and maintain the shoreline revetment and raise the elevation of the prism to provide resiliency to flooding and sea level rise. At the southern end, the trail will use the existing 17-foot-wide, 725-foot long railroad bridge to cross Eureka Slough. Additionally, approximately one mile of trail will be located on the perimeter levee around the Brainard mill site, with two new bridges providing connectivity between the railroad and levee trail sections. Other major project elements include a new bridge over Brainard Slough and the removal of the northern segment of mature Eucalyptus trees adjacent to Highway 101 and the railroad (see Exhibit 2: Project Maps for a detailed map of the trail segments).

Planning efforts, starting as early as 2001, have identified this section of trail as critical to the construction of the CCT around Humboldt Bay. Particularly, the Humboldt Bay Trails Feasibility Study (2001), funded by the Conservancy, and the Humboldt Bay Trail Feasibility Study: Eureka to Arcata 2007, funded by the Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) in which the Conservancy participated, identified the HBT as the preferred route for the CCT. Also, the Conservancy's Completing the California Coastal Trail (2003) report recommends that the CCT corridor develop links to Arcata and Eureka, and that the 2001 feasibility study be implemented. A 2016 Conservancy Grant to the City of Arcata helped fund construction of the Humboldt Bay Trail North, opened to the public in 2017.

The County managed an extensive community outreach effort during the planning phase of this project and has held regular meetings to update the public and gather input on the project. Even during the pandemic, the County has continued to present at countywide trails meetings to insure a transparent trail development process. The trail itself has been enthusiastically supported by the public. The only controversial issue has been the need to remove a section of

Eucalyptus Trees that are along the western edge of Highway 101. The County consulted with two independent arborists who both concluded that the trees were near the end of their lifespan and posed a hazard to the future trail users as well as automobile traffic on portions of Highway 101, and thus recommend that the trees be removed.

**Site Description:** The project begins in the north at Bracut Marsh at the terminus of the existing Humboldt Bay Trail North. That segment of trail was constructed by the City of Arcata, in part with Conservancy funds, and opened to the public in 2017. From there it travels southward following the railroad prism, or the existing levee adjacent to Humboldt Bay. At the southern end it will cross the Eureka Slough Bridge and connect with the City of Eureka's section of the California Coastal Trail. The trail will be located at the bay's edge and abuts several nearby salt marshes, wetlands and tidally influenced creeks. Vegetation cover consists of loosely vegetated patches of scrub-type plants, brambles and eucalyptus trees.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The County of Humboldt has led the trail planning and design phase of this project, and has significant experience constructing and maintaining sections of the California Coastal Trail. It assisted with the original construction of the Hammond Trail, part of the California Coastal Trail in McKinleyville, and currently maintains those sections of trail as well as the trail bridge over the Mad River.

#### **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 is consistent with two goals of the *California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report*. (1) The project supports Compact and Infill Development for Healthy and Equitable Communities and (2) Incorporates Climate Adaptation into all Planning and Investment projects. The proposed project will reduce vehicle miles traveled and associated CO2 emissions, expand active transportation opportunities, and consider the effects of climate change on public safety in trail planning.

The proposed project is consistent with the *CA Climate Adaptation Strategy/Safeguarding California*: (1) Reducing Climate Risk Plan to Incorporate Climate Risks in Infrastructure Planning and consider (2) Hazard Avoidance for New Development. The proposed project is designed to withstand potential hazards (e.g. flooding and sea level rise) during the life of the project. Also, the trail construction will account for potential risks and hazards during

the design life of the project (e.g., tsunami warnings, safety features such as fencing and railings).

The proposed project is consistent with the *CA Wildlife Action Plan* because the trail has been designed in a location that minimizes potential conflicts with wildlife use. The trail maintains the integrity of the existing drainage patterns that function within the ecosystem. It promotes partnership between local and federal agencies through coordination between the County and USFWS regarding trail activities and interpretive opportunities adjacent to HBNWR. It will inspire a conservation ethic in present and future generations through expanded interpretive opportunities.

The proposed project is consistent with the *California Essential Habitat Connectivity Strategy for Conserving a Connected California* because the trail design minimizes habitat barriers. Bridges were chosen for slough crossings because they are least disruptive to the aquatic habitat and maintain fish passage. Furthermore, bridges were designed to span the maximum length of the channels to avoid constructing abutments within the channel or on its banks, and piles will be driven using a vibratory pile driver to minimize acoustic impacts to sensitive species. As a result, the proposed project will not negatively impact essential fish habitat or critical habitat.

The trail will serve as a section of the California Coastal Trail as it runs along Humboldt Bay. Thus, the proposed project is consistent with *Completing the California Coastal Trail*.

The proposed project is also consistent with a number of local planning documents. It has been identified as a priority within Humboldt County Association of Governments' 2017 Regional Transportation Plan. The project is also identified as a priority in the Humboldt County Coastal Trail Implementation Strategy; Regional Bicycle Plan; and Regional Pedestrian Plan.

4. **Support of the public:** See "Project Letters".
5. **Location:** See the "Project Summary".
6. **Need:** The current improved trail terminates at Bracut Marsh, and pedestrians and cyclists must use the shoulder of the highway to continue south to Eureka, which is unsafe. The project will provide safe pedestrian and bicycle access, separated from Highway 101. The County of Humboldt has raised significant funding for the project and needs the Conservancy's proposed contribution to complete the project.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The project will construct 4.25 miles of California Coastal Trail, a statewide priority.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project has been carefully planned to account for flooding hazards and sea level rise. The County commissioned the Humboldt Bay Trail South Sea-Level Rise Vulnerability and Adaptation Report (ESA, 2018) to refine the technical understanding of vulnerability of the Project, inform the incorporation of resilience measures into the project design, and introduce concepts for future adaptation measures. In addition to planning for a sea level rise of 2 feet by 2070 and three feet by 2100 the

report provided estimates for wave heights and runup, stillwater flooding, and wave overtopping. These estimates were used to guide the final elevation for the trail surface.

A final trail elevation minimum of 10.5' NAVD88 was selected for the trail surface and the bridges will have a minimum height of 12' NAVD88. With this as the minimum trail elevation, trail usability should not be impacted with two feet of sea level rise during stillwater flooding events and would be impacted for a total of 20 hours/year with three feet of sea level rise.

The trail is adjacent to Humboldt Bay which subject to strong winds from the northwest during the spring and summer, and as well as wind from the southwest during winter storms. Wind waves have the potential to impact trail usability as well as damage the trail surface. The trail surface and elevation are designed to be passable and withstand 50-year wind waves (2% annual chance of occurrence) with a sea level rise of 2 feet. With three feet of sea level rise the trail would need to have a minimum elevation of 11' feet. The design elevation is less than this and a 50-year storm event in 2100 will cause the trail to be impassable during a high tide, although the hardened surface will not be damaged by the waves.

The elevation chosen for the trail was a balance between the need to account for sea level rise and the potential environmental impacts of increasing the height. Raising the elevation of a fill prism would help protect the trail from sea level rise, but the footprint of the trail would have to be wider and would therefore cause sections of the trail to encroach into adjacent wetlands. The design elevation is a compromise that still protects the trail from sea level rise during the lifespan of the project and also protects nearby wetlands.

### Additional Criteria

9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section below.
10. **Readiness:** The County of Humboldt will finalize design and permits in 2021 and will start construction on the project in 2022.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See Project Summary."
12. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** There are not expected to be any impacts aside from sea level rise which will impact the project.
13. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The project will result in some greenhouse gas emissions during construction; however, it will open a car-free cycling route between Humboldt County's two largest cities and therefore is expected to reduce overall emissions.

### PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$2,000,000
Active Transportation Program	13,300,000

## Humboldt Bay Trail South Construction

---

Caltrans	\$1,250,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$16,550,000</b>

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for the proposed project is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), codified at Public Resources Code ("PRC") section 75001 et seq. These funds may be used to promote public access to and enjoyment of coastal resources of the State. (PRC section 75060.) Conservancy projects funded utilizing Proposition 84 must be consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation. As discussed immediately below, this project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation.

The County of Humboldt has secured funding from the Active Transportation Program for the Humboldt Bay Trail South. In addition, Caltrans will be contributing towards the project as part of their nearby Highway 101 improvement project.

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

The proposed project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 et seq.) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states the Legislature's intent that the Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Consistent with Section 31400, the goal of the proposed project is to construct a trail along Humboldt Bay that will connect the Cities of Arcata and Eureka.

Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies such as the County of Humboldt to develop land for public access purposes to and along the coast where the accessway will serve more than local public needs. With its beautiful scenery of vast beaches and panoramic bluffs and mountains, Humboldt County is a recreational destination for many visitors from within the State and the nation. It will also complete a section of the California Coastal Trail and therefore the proposed project will serve more than local needs.

Section 31400.2 allows the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of public accessways by any public agency. The proposed \$2,000,000 Conservancy grant is leveraged by \$14,550,000 in matching funds secured by Humboldt County for the project.

Section 31400.3 allows the Conservancy to aid local agencies to establish a system of public coastal accessways. Consistent with Section 31400.3, the County of Humboldt is a local agency with jurisdiction to plan, construct and maintain the trails.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31408(a) that directs the Conservancy to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail (CCT), The proposed trail will

connect with a previously-constructed section of the CCT south of the City of Arcata with the CCT through the City of Eureka.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will complete a new 4.25 mile segment of the California Coastal Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will implement a project that expands access for people with disabilities to and along the coast by constructing accessible trail along Humboldt Bay.

Consistent with **Goal 16, Objective A** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will benefit a disadvantaged community by providing a safe non-motorized route between Arcata and Eureka and by providing new recreational opportunities.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The California Transportation Commission is the lead agency for this project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) due to the Alternative Transportation Program funding. On October 17, 2018 the CTC adopted the Humboldt Bay Trail South Initial Study and Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration ("MND") (Exhibit 4). The Conservancy, as a responsible agency, must independently consider the CTC's adopted MND and has the responsibility to mitigate or avoid the direct or indirect environmental effects within its jurisdiction.

The MND includes an analysis of the potential significant effects of the proposed project and concludes there is no potential significant impact from the proposed project on Aesthetics, Agriculture & Forestry Resources, Air Quality, Geology/Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hydrology/Water Quality, Land Use/Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population/Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation/Traffic, Tribal Cultural Resources, Utilities/Service Systems, including no possible significant cumulative impacts.

The Initial Study identifies potentially significant impacts of the proposed project on Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Hazards & Hazardous Materials. The MND provides mitigation for these possible significant effects that avoids, reduces, or minimizes the possible effect so that they are not significant. Each of these possible significant impacts and its mitigation are discussed below.

*Biological Resources*

The proposed project may have an adverse effect on fish, plants, birds, wetlands and riparian habitat from trail construction, materials and equipment staging, and heavy equipment ingress/egress to construction and staging areas.

Of seven potential special status plant species, three were found in the project area: Humboldt Bay owl's-clover, Point Reyes bird's-beak, and western sand-spurrey. Potential impacts to special status plant species will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (BIO-1: Avoidance and Protection Measures for Special-status Plants):

- (a) Pre-construction surveys will be conducted at the appropriate time of year to identify any rare plants;
- (b) If other special species are identified they will also be avoided;
- (c) Pre-construction surveys less than seven days prior to construction will take place for the species already identified;
- (d) If any plants are discovered that cannot be avoided seeds will be collected for re-planting; and
- (e) All seed mixes used for re-vegetation will consist of locally adapted native plant materials.

#### Special Status Wildlife

No special status species were observed during site visits but fish species such as Coho, Chinook, and Northern California Steelhead may frequent the area. Project activities such as pile driving and grading have the potential to impact these species. Potential impacts to salmonids will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (BIO-2: Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Fish):

- a) Areas will be blocked from access prior to dewatering;
- b) Vibratory pile drivers will be used to the maximum extent practicable to reduce hydroacoustic effects; and
- c) In-channel and in-bay work will be limited to July 1 – September 31, because fish will be least likely to be present.

Tidewater Goby has been documented further upstream from the project, and critical habitat has been mapped on the east side of Highway 101. Potential impacts to Tidewater Goby will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (BIO-3: Tidewater Goby Avoidance and Minimization Measures);

- a) No construction activities will be allowed with Goby habitat; and
- b) No pile driving of any kind will be allowed adjacent to Goby Habitat.

Suitable habitat exists for Northern Red-legged frog within the project area. Therefore red-legged frogs could occur and may be present during construction. Potential impacts to red-legged frog will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (BIO-4: Northern Red-legged Frog Avoidance and Minimization Measures):

- a) Construction in waterways and wetlands with standing water will be limited to between July 1 and October 30 to avoiding breeding adults;

- b) Less than 1 week prior to construction near suitable habitat a survey will be conducted; and
- c) Individuals found within an active construction zone will be relocated before construction can continue.

Construction and maintenance activities associated with the project could have a potentially significant effect on protected migratory birds. Impacts could include the abandonment of nests due to nearby construction. Potential impacts to migratory birds will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (BIO-5: Avoidance and Protection measures for Nesting Birds):

- a) Trees and vegetation that could contain nests will be removed outside of breeding season (March 15 – August 15), if at all possible. Within nesting season a qualified wildlife biologist will need to conduct pre-construction surveys before trees or vegetation with potential nesting areas are removed; and
- b) If nests are found an appropriate buffer will be created in consultation with the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Construction of the project has the potential to significantly impact both wetlands and jurisdictional waters. At the time the MND was prepared it was estimated that the project would impact up to 5.65 acres of waters of the United States and an additional .126 acres of waters of the State of California. Two mitigation measures were developed to reduce the impact below the level of significance (BIO-6: Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Waters of the United States and BIO-7: Compensatory Mitigation for Wetlands Impacts). The County of Humboldt will also continue to explore designs to further reduce the impact where the footprint of the trail overlaps waters of the United States. This could include fill in order to stabilize the trail prism and the installation of pilings for bridges.

BIO-6: This mitigation measure includes a set of best practices to reduce the overall footprint of the project, limit stormwater runoff, and to reduce the potential for hazardous construction materials to enter the water.

BIO-7: The County shall compensate for wetlands impacts through restoration, rehabilitation, and or/creation of wetlands. The County has entered into a draft MOU with Caltrans to work together on the development of wetland mitigation within the general project area as well as on the north spit of Humboldt Bay. Caltrans will be implementing improvements to Highway 101 and will also be mitigating for impacts to that project. They will combine efforts to make the mitigation more successful. The final amount of mitigation needed for the project will be determined during the permitting phase of the project.

### *Cultural Resources*

No artifacts, features, sites or other archeological cultural resources were encountered during the cultural resources investigation. It is therefore unlikely that the project will disturb any cultural resources during construction. Nevertheless there is always a potential for the discovery of resources during construction. Potential impacts to archeological cultural

resources will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (CR-1: Protect Archeological Resources during Construction and CR-2: Protect Human Remains if Encountered during Construction):

CR-1 If cultural materials are discovered work in that area will be stopped within 20 meters and a professional archeologist will evaluate the site and make recommendations.

CR-2 Construction will halt immediately should human remains or grave goods be discovered. The steps required by Public Resources Code 5097.9 and Health and Safety Code 7050.5 will then be followed.

#### *Hazards and Hazardous Materials*

An Initial Site Assessment was conducted for the project area and seven potential areas of concern were identified. This includes the former rail line, a Pepsi Cola Bottling Company, Target Store, APN 002-231-012, Former Redwood Oil Bulk Plant, California Redwood Company, and Bracut Industrial Park. They inspected the proposed trail alignment and found evidence to indicate that contaminated soils or hazardous materials are present. Accordingly, two mitigations measures were developed because of the potential for a hazardous material or contamination. Potential impacts due to hazardous materials will be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing the following mitigation measures (HAZ-1: Procedures for Encountering Unknown Hazardous Materials, HAZ-2: Preliminary Site Investigation and Sampling.)

HAZ-1: This mitigation measure is a set of Best Management Practices which will be implemented in case a hazardous or unknown material is encountered during construction. Construction will halt, the County of Humboldt will conduct sampling and if necessary coordinate with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

HAZ-2: The County shall ensure that in areas of ground disturbance a Preliminary Site Investigation will be conducted. This includes pre-construction soil borings to characterize the soil and groundwater. These samples will be analyzed by a lab for likely contaminants. The findings will be used to evaluate whether there is a risk to the construction works, and whether or not there is soil contamination.

## Humboldt Bay Trail South Construction

---

Staff has independently evaluated the Humboldt Bay Trail South Initial Study, Mitigated Negative Declaration, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program adopted by the California Transportation Commission as well as public comment? Staff concurs that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project will have a significant effect on the environment. Staff therefore recommends that the Conservancy find that the project as designed and mitigated avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment as that term is defined by 14 Cal. Code Regs. §15382.

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