



# Memo

Date: September 23, 2021

To: Members of the State Coastal Conservancy

From: Mary Small, Interim Executive Officer  
Amy Hutzler, Deputy Executive Officer

CC: Oversight Members

RE: Coastal Access Project Standards

Staff recommends that the Conservancy update its coastal access standards. Using a process described further below, staff has prepared the attached draft Coastal Access Project Standards for Conservancy and public review and comment (Exhibit 1).

Section 31401 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code states:

The conservancy shall develop and adopt standards to guide state and local public agencies and federal agencies to the extent permitted by federal law or regulations or the United States Constitution in acquiring and developing public access to coastal resources. Such standards shall be incorporated within an integrated system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline which shall become an element of the California Outdoor Recreation Resources Plan required by Section 5099.2.

The Conservancy adopted the existing coastal access standards, the Coastal Accessway Standards, in 1983. Conservancy staff use them in evaluating public access project proposals for funding and during management of grants for public access projects. Conservancy staff reference the pertinent standards in staff recommendations for coastal access projects. The standards are intended to be used by public entities and non-profit organizations when developing coastal access projects.

The existing standards are narrowly focused on accessways and are outdated. The draft Coastal Access Project Standards would replace the Coastal Accessway Standards entirely and would be used in the same manner as the Coastal Accessway Standards but would have broader applicability. The draft Coastal Access Project Standards include a greater focus on accessibility for people with disabilities, coordinating with California's tribes, and providing equitable and inclusive coastal access. They take into account sea level rise, encourage green design that considers climate change impacts and water conservation, call out the need for operations and maintenance, and expand the definition of lower-cost overnight accommodations beyond hostels. Guidelines for prioritizing locations of access projects and design of support facilities remain, but there is less of a focus on specific dimensions for accessway easements or trails.

The draft Coastal Access Project Standards were written by several Conservancy staff and a Coro fellow. All Conservancy staff were provided the opportunity to provide feedback and revisions were made to address their comments. The draft standards were then shared with staff at the Coastal Commission and State Parks, as well as with some County and Regional Parks Departments on the coast and with several nonprofits that conduct outdoor education programs on the coast. The valuable feedback and comments we received have been addressed in the attached draft.

We are now seeking feedback from the Conservancy and members of the public. Public comments will be accepted through November 5, 2021. Comments can be provided via email at [publiccomments@scc.ca.gov](mailto:publiccomments@scc.ca.gov). We will revise the standards to address comments and plan to bring the final Coastal Access Project Standards to the Conservancy for consideration and possible adoption at the December 2, 2021 Board meeting.

## *State Coastal Conservancy* **Coastal Access Project Standards**

The State Coastal Conservancy is responsible for helping develop a system of trails and coastal access points along the State's coastline and creating a continuous, interconnected public trail system spanning over 1,200 miles from Oregon to Mexico. Projects include trails, walkways and stairways to the beach; amenities such as overnight accommodations, parking, and restrooms; and programs that support coastal access, such as programs that provide field trips to the coast. The Conservancy's goals for coastal access includes access that is equitable and barrier-free; enhances inclusive public visitation; protects sensitive ecological areas; accounts for coastal hazards; incorporates green design; encourages non-motorized transportation; fosters appreciation and stewardship of the coast's natural and cultural resources; and links communities to the coast. To achieve these goals, the standards should be used by public entities and non-profit organizations that are developing coastal access projects or preparing Local Coastal Programs. The Conservancy will use these standards in considering public access project proposals for funding and during management of grants for public access projects. As site conditions vary along the coast, the application of these standards is flexible.

### **Standard #1: Location**

The location of public access projects should be prioritized by these criteria where possible:

- Location lacks adequate access improvements or needs additional access improvements to address demand from public.
- Project completes a segment of the Coastal Trail or other state or regional trails, or project connects communities to the Coastal Trail or other state or regional trails.
- Project provides public access to beaches or other coastal resources.
- Location is easily accessed by, popular with, and/or selected based on engagement with underserved and/or frontline communities. Underserved and/or frontline communities include low-income communities, people with disabilities, immigrants, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- Location can be accessed in various ways, such as by walking or hiking, by bicycle or other non-motorized transportation, by public transportation, and/or by private vehicle.
- Project location can be accessed via safe pedestrian and bicycle crossings of roadways and railroads.

### **Standard #2: Support Facilities**

Projects should have adequate facilities and amenities to support public access. Facilities and amenities should be based on regional needs and input from existing and potential users. Examples of facilities and amenities include the following:

- Visitor kiosks and visitor centers.

- Parking lots for cars and/or buses, electric vehicle charging stations, bike racks, bike repair or fix-it stations, and passenger drop-off areas.
- Lower-cost overnight accommodations (see Standard #9).
- Restrooms, showers, drinking fountains, and trash and recycle containers.
- Benches, picnic tables, overlooks, beach wheelchairs, and beach mats.
- Shade structures, pavilions, ball fields or courts, grilling/BBQ facilities, food vendors, and play structures or play areas.
- Facilities to support organized groups and outdoor education, such as seating areas, amphitheaters, or group picnic areas.
- Boardwalks, trails, sidewalks, bike lanes or trails, piers, non-motorized boat ramps, and docks.
- Lifeguard and first aid stations.
- Welcome signs, directional signs, and natural, historical, and cultural resource interpretation signs and displays.

Directional and interpretive signs should be welcoming and accessible to as many visitors as possible. This may include translation into multiple languages, use of images instead of or in addition to text, use of plain language, and inclusive design techniques that serve people with disabilities. Inclusive design techniques may include, but are not limited to, consideration of color contrast, font and font size, and height of signs. Interpretive themes should reflect California's diversity, be culturally relevant to a diversity of visitors, be developed in conjunction with a diversity of communities, and encourage personal connection to and stewardship of the California coast.

### **Standard #3: Inclusion and Access for Persons with Disabilities**

Projects should address accessibility for persons with disabilities during the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of a project, as well as in the provision of programs at the project site. To extent possible, projects should incorporate inclusive access design. Barriers to access include physical obstacles that prevent or restrict the use of a facility or trail, lack of information about accessibility of the site, and lack of programs that serve people of all abilities. Projects should:

- Be planned, designed, constructed, and maintained to comply with state and federal accessibility guidelines, and incorporate inclusive design principles where possible.
- Incorporate recommendations from the California State Parks Accessibility Guidelines, and the reports referenced therein, during the planning and design process.
- Integrate access facilities and amenities designed for those with disabilities with improvements designed for all users.
- Design and construct facilities and amenities that allow for the provision of inclusive programs and activities that serve people of all abilities.
- Seek feedback from people with disabilities during project planning and design.
- Provide clear descriptions about site and facility accessibility on websites, signs, brochures, and in other forms to allow for persons with disabilities to make informed decisions prior to and during their visit.

- Ensure licensees, consultants, service providers, and other entities are aware of their obligation to provide inclusive programs and activities.
- Monitor the physical improvements and any programs and activities to ensure continued accessibility.

#### **Standard #4: California’s Tribes**

Projects should, where possible:

- Include early consultation and coordination with tribes. This consultation should start as early as possible to ensure the project is routed, planned, designed, implemented, and managed in a manner that respects indigenous lands and culture.
- Assist tribes in regaining access to their ancestral lands, including the ability to engage in traditional stewardship and cultural practices or co-management of their ancestral lands and resources.
- Incorporate tribal land acknowledgements into programs and signage, developed in conjunction with tribal representatives.
- Ensure educational and interpretative materials and programming include indigenous perspectives.

#### **Standard #5: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

The project should be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy’s Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Guidelines. To extent feasible, projects should:

- Create a welcoming environment that respects and represents people’s differences; embraces multicultural and indigenous histories and presence; and cultivates community empowerment, care of natural and cultural resources, personal connections, and a sense of belonging.
- Reduce socio-economic barriers to coastal access, such as localism, financial barriers, cultural barriers that prevent people from feeling welcome, lack of transportation options, and a lack of information about coastal access and the logistics of reserving or accessing sites.
- Increase equitable access to the coast and coastal watersheds for all Californians, prioritizing access for underserved and/or frontline communities that face barriers to coastal access.
- Promote meaningful community engagement, develop plans in collaboration with communities, and involve underserved communities early in project planning and decision-making.
- Provide coastal experiences for people that may face challenges getting to or enjoying the coast (such as lower-income people, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, people with disabilities, English as a Second Language communities, or students from Title 1 schools) and create opportunities for people to visit the coast for the first time.
- Provide a valuable recreational, environmental, cultural, or historic learning experience. In project design, recognize the cultural values intrinsic to coastal sites.
- Include a communication and outreach plan so that communities are aware of coastal access opportunities.

## **Standard #6: Cultural Resources, Natural Environment, and Hazards**

Project planning and design should take into account any sensitive cultural resources on or near the site such as archeological sites, historic sites, historic structures, and cultural landscapes. Plans and designs should avoid or minimize adverse impacts to cultural resources and, if possible, enhance the cultural resource.

Project planning and design should take into account sensitive natural resources on or near the site, such as wetlands, tidepools, creeks and rivers, and habitat for special-status species. Plans and designs should avoid or minimize adverse impacts to environmentally sensitive areas, and, if possible, enhance natural resources.

Project design should include the evaluation of the potential impact of natural hazards on the project. The anticipated impacts of sea level rise to the project should be assessed and planned for in projects. Sea level rise projections should be based on latest science and State of California guidelines. Wildfire, flooding, erosion, and other coastal hazards should be planned for in project design. Nature-based adaptation to climate change should be used wherever possible.

The management and construction of public access projects should not increase the potential impacts of natural hazards such as erosion, sea level rise, fire, and flooding to adjacent communities and infrastructure.

## **Standard #7: Green Design**

The project should consider climate change and incorporate green design wherever possible. Green design may include:

- Site and landscaping design that includes drought-tolerant and/or native plants, use of grey water for irrigation, permeable surfaces, stormwater retention, minimal grading, urban forests, and design elements that decrease urban heat islands.
- Use of sustainable and/or recycled building materials, energy and water efficient fixtures, renewable energy such as solar panels, and inclusion of electric vehicle charging stations.
- Construction that minimizes greenhouse gas emissions and waste.
- Accessibility to the project site by public transit, walking, bicycles, or other non-motorized transportation and ability for the project's trails or accessways to serve as alternative transportation corridors.
- Design features to preserve or enhance views.

## **Standard #8: Operation and Maintenance**

Project design should account for long term operation and maintenance considerations. Conservancy grants typically require grantee to operate and maintain improvements for 20 years. These considerations could include:

- Design that takes anticipated maintenance level into account.

- Use of long-lasting construction materials that can withstand harsh environments and heavy public use.
- Designs that include easily maintained landscaping, site infrastructure (such as utilities and stormwater systems), and facilities and amenities (see Standard #2).
- Designs to discourage graffiti and/or allow for easy removal.
- Easy access for operations and maintenance personnel and vehicles.
- Funding plan for long-term operations and maintenance.

**Standard #9: Lower-Cost Overnight Accommodations**

If applicable and relevant, the project should:

- Improve the ability to access lower cost overnight accommodations on the coast, particularly for low and middle-income households and organizations that serve underserved communities.
- Minimize barriers and inequities to accessing accommodations, with opportunities like reservation set-asides, discounts, outreach, partnerships with community groups, and lower-cost transportation options such as community shuttles.
- Increase the overall quantity of lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast. Types of overnight accommodations may include hotels, motels, campsites, hostels, recreational vehicle (RV) sites, trailers, cabins, yurts, semi-permanent RV cabins, dorm rooms, and residential outdoor education facilities.

**Standard #10: Federal, State and Local Land Use Policy Consistency**

The project should promote, where possible, cooperation amongst various agencies to achieve connectivity between public access facilities. The project should be consistent with the public access provisions of the Coastal Conservancy Act, Division 21, Chapter 9 (Public Resources Code Secs. 31400-31410), the coastal resources planning and management policies of the California Coastal Act, Division 20, Chapter 3 (Public Resources Code Secs. 30200-30265.5), applicable certified Local Coastal Programs, and other applicable federal, state, and local planning policies.