

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
December 2, 2021

HOLLISTER RANCH COASTAL ACCESS PROGRAM

Project No. 19-007-01
Project Manager: Trish Chapman

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$60,000 to augment an existing Conservancy authorization of \$400,230 for consultant services to facilitate development of a contemporary Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program, in Santa Barbara County.

LOCATION: Gaviota Coast, Santa Barbara County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [October 17, 2019 Staff Recommendation](#)
Exhibit 3: [Draft Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

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

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) to augment previously authorized disbursements to contract for additional consultant services to facilitate development of a contemporary Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program on the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization remains consistent with Public Resources Code Sections 31111 and 31104, regarding the Conservancy's ability to undertake planning and feasibility studies and receive financial support from public sources to carry out the purposes of Division 21. The project also remains consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding a System of Public Accessways.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$60,000 to augment \$350,000 previously approved by the Conservancy on October 17, 2019, and \$50,230 subsequently authorized by the Executive Officer to contract for additional consultant services to facilitate development of a contemporary Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program (HRCAP or Program). The goal of the HRCAP is to resolve a long-standing conflict regarding providing public access to an 8.5-mile stretch of the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County. The HRCAP is being developed through a collaborative effort of the Coastal Commission (Commission), Coastal Conservancy, State Parks, and the State Lands Commission, collectively referred to as the State Agency Team (SAT). See Exhibit 2 for additional background information.

In July of 2019, the Conservancy entered into a \$50,000 contract with KTUA, a landscape design firm, to assist with initial planning for the access program. In October 2019 the Conservancy authorized disbursement of an additional \$300,000 provided by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to augment the original contract. In February 2021, the Executive Officer of the Conservancy approved an additional \$50,230 contract augmentation for modifications to the community engagement plan largely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On September 24, the Coastal Commission released the Draft HRCAP (Exhibit 3) developed by the SAT with assistance from KTUA. The Coastal Commission planned a day-long workshop on the Draft HRCAP for October 14 but the workshop was postponed due to the Alisal fire along the Gaviota Coast. It is likely that the Commission will ask for additional information prior to considering approval of the final HRCAP at a meeting in 2022. The proposed augmentation would be used to secure further assistance from KTUA to undertake any additional work requested by the Commission.

Site Description: See Exhibits 2 and 3.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

Selection Criteria

1. **Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below and in Exhibit 2.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

In 2019 Governor Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1680 which directed the four state agencies to develop a contemporary plan for coastal access to the Hollister Ranch beaches. In 2021, the State budget included a \$10 million appropriation to the Conservancy for public access to the Hollister Ranch beaches. These two actions by the legislature and the Governor illustrate that the HRCAP is a priority for the State.

Public access to the Hollister Ranch beaches has been the subject of a 40-year conflict with strong opinions and emotions on multiple sides. In addition, Hollister Ranch is located in a fairly remote, undeveloped part of the coast. For both of these reasons, developing a public access program for the Hollister Ranch beaches is challenging. The planning costs to date and the proposed augmentation are reasonable given the challenge of this project and the extra challenge of conducting extensive community engagement during the pandemic.

3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.

The HRCAP was developed with extensive tribal input from the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (SYBCI), the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation, Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians, and the Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians. The HRCAP includes a Chumash Cultural Access component that would allow Chumash tribal members to engage in activities associated with Chumash cultural practices that general public users will not be allowed to do. For example, Chumash-specific access could include the ability to access the beaches on days when access is closed to others or before sunrise and after sunset; permission to harvest seagrasses, shellfish, and shells for cultural uses to the extent allowed by law; and/or permission to have fires on the beach during ceremonial activities.

The HRCAP also identifies the need for a cultural and tribal resource survey to be conducted prior to opening the Hollister Ranch beaches for public access and calls for this survey to be done with the guidance and leadership of the Chumash tribes. The SAT is also discussing with the tribes opportunities for tribal-led education of public visitors on Chumash culture and history, and roles the tribes may want to have in future management of the public access program.

4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

The impacts of sea-level rise over the coming decades will lead to significant changes to the Hollister Ranch coastline as coastal bluffs erode, beaches flood, and coastal ecosystems evolve. Planning for installation of any permanent infrastructure for the HRCAP will include an analysis of sea-level rise impacts and design recommendations to increase the resiliency and adaptability of public access improvements. Sustainability will also be enhanced through the use of electric shuttles and installation electric vehicle charging stations at a future staging area.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impacts.

The HRCAP will provide public access to a beautiful, largely undisturbed part of the southern California coastline, providing a unique coastal experience for Californians. One of the

Program’s objectives is to provide equitable access and the Program calls for providing periodic shuttle access directly from northern Santa Barbara communities such as Guadalupe, Lompoc and Santa Maria to more proactively serve low-income, people of color, immigrant, and English learner communities. The Chumash Cultural Access component (see below) is also important for providing equitable access. In addition, the Program has been carefully designed to minimize impacts to biological, cultural, and tribal resources and reduce conflicts with cattle operations on the Ranch. Finally, the Program provides the community with ongoing oversight of the access program through the HRCAP Advisory Committee that will be formed.

6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

The planning effort for the HRCAP utilized a multi-faceted public engagement approach to incorporate the interests and concerns of a broad range of Californians. Although the project started with face-to-face meetings and workshops, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the public engagement process was switched entirely to a virtual environment. Public engagement included: 1) creation of a working group of 18 people with different backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives on public access to help develop the public access program. The Working Group met five times. It helped to establish the Program Objectives and the planning evaluation criteria, and provided feedback on the development of the HRCAP conceptual approach, options related to visitor capacities, and creation of an Advisory Committee; 2) several listening sessions held with smaller groups of stakeholders including tribes, representatives of environmental justice communities, environmental educators, surfers, Hollister Ranch homeowners and others; 3) a series of surveys was provided to the more than 1700 people on HRCAP email list; 4) a virtual meeting to present the Conceptual Program and receive feedback had more than 100 people participate; and 5) tribal consultations. Chapter 3 of the Draft HRCAP provides more detail on the community engagement undertaken to prepare the Draft HRCAP (Exhibit 3).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$60,000
<u>Previously authorized:</u>	
California State Parks (<i>via</i> a grant to the Conservancy)]	\$300,000
Coastal Conservancy	\$100,230
Project Total	\$460,230

Conservancy funds for the proposed augmentation are expected to derive from appropriations to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code Sections 75001-75090). Proposition 84 (Public Resources Code Sec. 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 and that are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Division 21. The

proposed project serves to assist in the development of public access on the coast and the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 as discussed in Exhibit 2.

California State Parks provided funds specifically for development of the HRCAP.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Enabling Legislation as described in the October 17, 2019, staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

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

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan as described in the October 17, 2019, staff recommendation (Exhibit 2).

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

In its October 17, 2019, authorization, Conservancy staff found the project statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15262 and categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15306. The project elements have not changed since the October 17, 2019 authorization, and the project remains exempt from evaluation under CEQA. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval.