

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 2, 2021

**GGNRA Hawk Hill Access Improvements Phase 3**

Project No. 18-018-02  
Project Manager: Peter Jarausch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$242,000 to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy to complete the final phase of the Hawk Hill Access Improvements Project within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area at Hawk Hill, Marin County.

**LOCATION:** Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Marin County

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)

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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 a grant of an amount not to exceed two hundred and forty-two thousand dollars (\$242,000) to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (“the grantee”) to complete the final phase of the Hawk Hill Access Improvements Project within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area at Hawk Hill, Marin 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.
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5. In addition, to the extent appropriate, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy 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 a system of public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Golden Gate Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$242,000 grant to the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) to complete the final phase of the Hawk Hill Access Improvements Project, which consists of habitat restoration and access improvements at Hawk Hill in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), Marin County. When complete, improved trails will provide access from the Conzelman Road parking area to overlooks, seating, panoramic views, and a number of rehabilitated historic features. The area currently receives over 150,000 visitors a year and improvements are needed to better serve the visitors, restore degraded areas and prevent damage to natural and historic resources.

The proposed project, is Phase 3 of the Hawk Hill Access Improvements Project. The proposed project will improve visitor access and safety and rehabilitate structures at the top of Hawk Hill. Phase 1 created a new accessible trail from Casement 1 to the Hilltop Area. Phase 2 work, funded in part by a previous Conservancy grant, is ongoing and will create an accessible loop through historic tunnels, create two accessible overlooks, construct two vault toilets, and provide interpretive signage and bicycle parking. Phase 3 will expand educational opportunities through enhanced wayfinding, interpretive materials, and an improved gathering area for school groups; improve sustainability and accessibility specifically in alignment with Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility standards (ABAAS) of trails, overlooks and seating; rehabilitate historic structures; and protect and enhance natural and cultural resources.

Specific improvements for Phase 3 include new interpretive and wayfinding signs to provide the public with greater information about the natural and cultural resources of the site. Two thousand five hundred linear feet of fencing, guardrails, and railings will be installed for public safety. A new seating area for groups will be developed with 30 linear feet of metal benches on a concrete seat wall so that visitors have places to enjoy the amazing views and wildlife. Accessibility improvements will include replacement of approximately 500 linear feet of existing

dirt trail with accessible trail tread surfacing and 450 linear feet of existing asphalt with new accessible asphalt pathways thereby making the site truly accessible for the first time.

This project also rehabilitates the unique WWII era Battery Commander Station and the last remaining elevated Nike Radar Platform (Nike Site SF87C Target Tracking Platform) within the GGNRA both of which are located at the top of Hawk Hill. A new bridge will provide public access to the radar platform which will be transformed into a viewing area. Before the public has access to the WWII area features the project will remediate hazardous materials such as lead paint on historic structures and in the surrounding soil. The remediation aspect of the project will protect site workers and the public as well as the unique habitat which supports a wide array of wildlife, including the endangered Mission blue butterfly.

In addition to the improvements about the project will also implement a stormwater mitigation and biological monitoring program related to the construction. Restore and revegetate an approximately .16-acre area with native plant species to protect and enhance endangered Mission blue butterfly habitat. And native plants will be used to revegetate and areas that were disturbed during construction.

**Site Description:** Located within five miles of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Presidio, Sausalito, and Fort Baker, Hawk Hill is accessible via car, bicycle, or on foot, and attracts both local residents and visitors from all over the world, providing a spectacular 360 degree view of the surroundings including the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco Bay, and the Pacific Ocean.

Hawk Hill, or Battery Construction 129, is home to structures from two distinct eras in our military history, World War II and the Cold War. In preparation for the new and improved battleships used in World War II, the military installed two large pits to hold guns that could shoot up to two miles offshore. By the time the tunnels, magazines, and gunpits were built, the war was over and the guns were never installed. In addition to the gunpits, a Battery Commander station was installed on the hilltop and camouflaged with soil and native plants.

Hawk Hill is part of the 75,000-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It overlooks the Pacific Ocean to the south and to the north provides a view over public lands which stretch all the way to the summit of Mount Tamalpais. The area consists largely of rolling hills covered in coastal scrub and grasslands. It is also a critical location for migrating raptors which rest and then use the area gain elevation for their crossing of the entrance to San Francisco Bay.

In addition, the site is bordered to the east and west by endangered Mission blue butterfly habitat. The Mission blue butterfly has attracted ecologists' attention for decades as it was one the first invertebrates to be protected under the Endangered Species Act. In recent years, efforts have been made at Hawk Hill to enhance the Mission blue butterfly's habitat and prevent further degradation of historic structures by removing non-native invasive trees and restoring the native grassland. These efforts were augmented with comprehensive vegetation management that has included planting native species and invasive species removal.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:**

The GGNPC is one of the most accomplished national park partners in the nation, having completed major park building and restoration projects across the 75,000-acre GGNRA, also known as the Golden Gate National Park, hosting award-winning public programs at the Crissy Field Center, and has raised more than \$400 million in support to the parks. GGNPC has completed numerous projects with state funds including several major Coastal Conservancy grants and has an established, excellent fiscal system and dedicated finance staff. GGNPC has a strong track record of partnering with the NPS in the planning and implementation of major priority projects in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Notable projects that were partially funded by the Conservancy include: the restoration of Crissy Field (San Francisco), Mori Point (San Mateo County), Redwood Creek watershed/Muir Beach (Marin County), Presidio Trails (including California Coastal Trail) and Lands End (San Francisco). The National Park Service is currently constructing the Phase 2 improvements at Hawk Hill which were supported by a 2018 grant from the Conservancy.

**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 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.

**2. Project is a good investment of state resources.**

The project is a benefit to all Californians by protecting and enhancing this significant resource. Over 150,000 visitors every year enjoy views from Hawk Hill. This project is the final phase of improvements to the site which will better protect the site from heavy use. Trails will be improved and the viewing area at the top will be made safer. This project will also meet the state’s goal of increasing access for all Californians. The new trails and overlook will be compliant with the Architectural Barriers Act. This will make it easier for all visitors to enjoy the site. The Conservancy’s funding is the last piece of funding needed to implement the project and is heavily leveraged by federal and private funds.

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

The project has been designed by the National Park Service to accommodate both increased visitation as well as changes in the intensity and frequency of rainfall in the winter. The National Park Service is committed to maintaining the area as it is one of the most heavily visited areas in the GGNRA.

**4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

Hawk Hill is used by Golden Gate Raptor Observatory (GGRO), Headlands Institute (HI), Point Bonita YMCA, Headlands Center for the Arts and Park Partner educators. These park partners have thousands of participants a year in their Hawk Hill programs.

As a citizen science program, the GGRO is unsurpassed. Hundreds of volunteers have spent decades learning about raptor species and monitoring the raptor numbers and the timing of the raptor migration. Hawk Hill is perhaps the most easily visited raptor migration site in the world and the site enhancements included in this project will make that wildlife-oriented recreation opportunity much more accessible to locals and visitors from around the world. GGRO staff and volunteers continue to be involved in the project planning and are excited to see this long-awaited project come to fruition.

The Point Bonita YMCA works with school groups from around the Bay Area and specifically targets underserved youth from urban areas for their programs. They bring students to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area for overnight trips and environmental education.

**5. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

The Hawk Hill Improvement Project (Phases 1-3)\_ has been under development for a number of years. Both the National Park Service as well as the GGNPC have conducted multiple outreach meetings to involve the public in planning the project. In addition, organizations which actively use Hawk Hill for their programming have been directly involved in the planning. Those organizations directly support the improvements that will take place through this project.

**PHASE 3 PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$242,000</b>
National Park Service Centennial Award	\$1,532,000
Shelby Cullom Davis Charitable Foundation	1,094,000
Wildlife Conservation Board	204,077
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$2,830,077</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 below, this project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation.

GGNPC in partnership with GGNRA has also secured a grant from the National Park Service (Centennial Award), money available to national park units to for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service. This funding requires a 100% non-federal match. In addition, GGNPC has secured funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board and a significant private donation from the Shelby Cullom Davis Charitable Foundation.

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

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (§ 31400 et seq.) relating to the provision of public access to the coast. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy shall have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline.

In particular, this project is consistent with PRC § 31400.1, which allows the Conservancy to provide grants to nonprofit organizations to develop lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. Consistent with section 31400.3, the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is required to aid nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public accessways. The proposed authorization will enable the GGNPC to improve access for all abilities to a coastal viewpoint. Consistent with § 31400.2, the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy for this project is based upon the amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the GGNPC, the urgency of this project and the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, as described below.

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

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

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will fund the construction of a new facility to enhance coastal recreational opportunities.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

Staff has determined that the proposed actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under the CEQA Guidelines, title 14 California Code of Regulations, §§ 15301, 15303, 15304, and 15333.

Section 15304 exempts minor alternations in the condition of land, water, and vegetation. The trail rehabilitation and other improvements to the site, including native plantings will involve minor trenching and backfilling and the area will be restored once the trail construction is complete.

Section 15303 exempts the new construction of small structures including accessory buildings. The project will turn an existing historic radar facility into a viewing platform by constructing a short bridge to it, and will construct a new seat wall to accommodate visitors.

The restoration of native plants and vegetation is categorically exempt under § 15333, which exempts small habitat restoration projects not exceeding five acres in size, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife. These activities meet the additional conditions of this exemption in that there would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat; there are

no hazardous materials at or around the site; and the project will not result in significant impacts when viewed in connection with the effects of past, present, or probably future projects.