

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
March 24, 2022

**ANTONELLI POND ALL-ACCESS TRAIL CONSTRUCTION**

Project No. 20-001-02  
Project Manager: Hilary Hill

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$530,000 to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to construct an all-access trail and improvements to associated visitor-serving amenities at Antonelli Pond in Santa Cruz County and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**LOCATION:** Antonelli Pond, City of Santa Cruz (County of Santa Cruz)

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Designs](#)

Exhibit 4: CEQA - Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Antonelli Pond Accessible Trail Project available here:  
<https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/2021080417>

Exhibit 5: [Project Letters](#)

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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 five hundred thirty thousand dollars (\$530,000) to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County (“the grantee”) to construct an all-access trail and improvements to associated visitor-serving amenities at Antonelli Pond in the City of Santa Cruz.

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:

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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.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee shall incorporate the guidelines of the Conservancy's 'Coastal Access Project Standards'.

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 System of Public Accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
3. The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.
4. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Antonelli Pond Accessible Trail Project adopted by the City of Santa Cruz on December 2, 2021, 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.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of \$530,000 to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County ("LTSCC") to support construction of a 0.42 mile all-access trail at Antonelli Pond and additional visitor-serving amenities such as pond overlooks, a pond access point, wheelchair-accessible picnic tables, interpretive signage, and a native demonstration garden. Antonelli Pond is an open space area on the western edge of the City of Santa Cruz that is owned and managed by LTSCC. Antonelli Pond comprises a 6.4-acre freshwater pond; the surrounding riparian woodland, marsh, shrubs, and grassy areas; and unimproved trails around the pond that provide scenic views of the area. The goal of the proposed project is to provide access to and around Antonelli Pond for people of all abilities.

Currently, the earthen paths along Antonelli Pond limit access by people with physical disabilities or other mobility challenges as the paths are uneven, and narrower and at times steeper than allowed under the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). By creating an all-access path along the pond, as proposed by this project, the location will be easier to maneuver for people with disabilities, families with young children, people using strollers, seniors, and bicyclists, enhancing recreational opportunities for all visitors to bird watch, fish, and participate in other interpretive/outdoor education programs.

The Coastal Conservancy holds an access easement to and along the eastern side of Antonelli Pond. In 2018, the Conservancy drafted its ADA Transition Plan identifying physical barriers on Conservancy properties, which included improvements needed at its easement at Antonelli Pond. The Conservancy contacted LTSCC about this report, and LTSCC proposed a larger project to improve access and accessibility across the entire site. In 2020 the Conservancy authorized a grant to LTSCC for the planning of the project that is now proposed for construction. The designs, environmental review, and permitting are now complete and the project is ready to construct in Fall 2022.

The proposed project is designed to address the need for accessible trail infrastructure at Antonelli Pond. Approximately 0.42 miles of accessible trail will be constructed, generally following the footprint of the existing dirt path along Antonelli Pond for the full length of the westside of the pond and halfway down the eastern side (Exhibit 3). The trail will be six-foot wide and made with pervious concrete and stabilized decomposed granite and will meet compliance with ADA standards including slope, width, and surface material. The trail will not traverse the full length of the eastern side due to constraints with the alignment—to achieve ADA standards the trail would require considerable cut into the sloped bank, installation of substantial infrastructure, and use of neighboring property. In addition, this section is not as highly desirable because it does not have a view of the pond.

The project includes construction of a pond overlook and accessible pond access point on the eastern side of the pond; and another pond overlook, wheelchair-accessible picnic area, and native demonstration garden on the western side of the pond. An existing dock and stair structure that are in poor condition in an erosive area will be removed. To address the erosion, slope stabilization and riparian woodland restoration will be implemented. To allow for a park host to continue to live on-site to monitor and maintain the property year-round, the project includes paving the host site (a trailer/RV pad) and driveway with pervious concrete.

As part of the project, interpretive signage will be installed across the site describing the natural ecology of Antonelli Pond. Designs for this project emphasize shoreline access and upgrades to existing amenities to ensure inclusive and sustainable access. Parking spaces for people with disabilities will be signed and striped by the City of Santa Cruz on Delaware Avenue once the project is complete.

Antonelli Pond is among a trail network of pedestrian and bike paths that provide local and regional connectivity, including Natural Bridges State Beach trails, UC Santa Cruz Coastal Science Campus trails, West Cliff Drive, Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail, and the future Coastal Rail Trail. As such, the Antonelli Pond trails are part of the California Coastal Trail network. LTSCC is working with the City of Santa Cruz to extend the sidewalk along Delaware

Street to connect the east and west pond trails to improve a safer connection and is also working with the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission to create connections to the future Coastal Rail Trail.

The Conservancy has a history of investment at Antonelli Pond, including funding for the original acquisition of the property by LTSCC in 1982 and another grant in 1986 to develop unpaved walking trails and associated access amenities around the pond. The proposed project will further Conservancy investment at Antonelli Pond and will address the need for the expansion of accessible trail infrastructure, including on the Conservancy's easement at Antonelli Pond.

**Site Description:** Antonelli Pond is located in a semi-urban area on the west side of the City of Santa Cruz between Delaware Avenue and Highway 1, and adjacent to Natural Bridges State Beach and the railroad trestle (Exhibit 1). The project area is 19 acres and includes Antonelli Pond, a 6.4-acre man-made pond, and a mosaic of riparian woodland, shrub, freshwater marsh, and grassy areas (Exhibit 2). Antonelli Pond is fed by Moore Creek and its waters flow a third of a mile downstream to reach Monterey Bay via a creek and coastal lagoon located within Natural Bridges State Beach.

This location is part of the ancestral territory of the Awaswas-speaking Uypi Tribe, which is represented contemporarily as the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. LTSCC has owned and stewarded the Antonelli Pond property for public access since acquiring the property in phases from 1982-1994. The Conservancy holds a public access easement over the trail on the eastern side of the pond, after accepting an offer to dedicate for the easement in 2001.

Existing access features at the Antonelli Pond property include unimproved walking trails that provide access to either side of the pond, a fishing platform, wooden stairway, benches, and informational signage. Other than these improvements, the property is undeveloped. The property is also close to popular recreation destinations including Natural Bridges State Beach, West Cliff Drive path, trails at UCSC Coastal Science Campus, Moore Creek Preserve, and the future Coastal Rail Trail.

Over 125 species of birds, five reptile, five amphibian, and fifteen mammal species use the pond. No populations of protected species are present; however, the property contains several sensitive habitats including freshwater marsh, seasonal wetland, and riparian woodland that are Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs). There are well-established populations of invasive species on the property (i.e. Poison Hemlock, Cape Ivy, English Ivy, Himalayan Blackberry, the aquatic plant Azolla, and non-native predatory fish such as bass) due to former industrial uses of the site which included a lumber mill, begonia farm, mushroom factory, speakeasy, 1920s Hollywood movie set, dairy farm, and one of the first artichoke farms.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** LTSCC has a long history of protecting, caring for, and connecting people to natural lands in Santa Cruz County. Since its establishment in 1978, LTSCC has protected over 15,000 acres of land. With an annual operating budget of approximately \$3 million dollars and a \$9 million dollar budget for capital projects, the nonprofit is financially equipped to handle ownership and management responsibilities over their properties. Having received prior State grants, LTSCC is well-versed in meeting State grant requirements.

The proposed project is listed as a capital project in LTSCC's 2022 Strategic Plan. LTSCC will rely on both in-house staff and contractors to manage the Conservancy grant and carry out the proposed project. LTSCC staff have proven capacity managing trail construction projects, exemplified by the recent completion of 7 miles of natural surface trails completed at Glenwood Open Space Preserve in Scotts Valley in 2020. LTSCC has a management plan for each of its properties of the ongoing management and maintenance needs, including Antonelli Pond. The monitoring, evaluation, and reporting requirements for the Antonelli Pond Accessible Trail project will be added as tasks to the Antonelli Pond management plan. Lastly, Antonelli Pond is part of LTSCC's park host program, which designates an on-site volunteer who lives in an RV or trailer at the property, monitors the site daily and performs visitor service and maintenance duties around the site, which ensures ongoing and adequate management of the property and its improvements.

**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.**

By creating all-access trails at Antonelli Pond, the proposed project meets state goals for inclusive public access, and access to open space and California's waterways. Antonelli Pond is one of the few freshwater environments that can be enjoyed by the public in the Santa Cruz area and provides a unique coastal experience. Antonelli Pond is at the intersection of a network of bike and pedestrian paths, including the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail, the Coastal Rail Trail, Natural Bridges State Park, West Cliff Drive, and the UC Santa Cruz Coastal Science Campus trails, which provide local and regional connectivity to and along the coast. The project will address accessibility improvements identified in the Conservancy's ADA Transition Plan.

**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.**

In 2020 the Conservancy sent letters to California Native American tribes in Santa Cruz County inquiring if any tribes would like to initiate tribal consultation on the proposed project and no tribes responded. In 2021, no tribes requested consultation during the CEQA process.

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

The proposed trail and access amenities are designed to be resilient and long-lasting once constructed. The project will relocate an existing pond access point from an eroding bank to a more sustainable location, and restore the eroded bank. Typical Conservancy grant requirements require constructed improvements to be maintained for at least 20 years, although the lifespan of this project is expected to be longer. LTSCC has adequate resources to manage and maintain the improvements.

The proposed trail is designed such that it won't exacerbate any environmental or climate change impacts. Surfacing material for the trail will be pervious, allowing water to penetrate rather than increase-runoff. The surfacing material, Granitecrete, eliminates the heat island effect to which other hardscape treatments may contribute.

The Ordinary High Watermark (OHW) for Antonelli Pond is 38 feet above sea level and all trails are placed above that elevation. No adaptive management approaches for sea level rise are anticipated or required for this site.

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

The project will provide multiple benefits by increasing inclusive public access to Antonelli for people of all abilities while also restoring natural habitats that have been degraded due to existing use. The project advances the Conservancy's Coastal Access Standards, including Inclusion and Access for Persons with Disabilities. The proposed project removes physical barriers at Antonelli Pond, increasing access to people of all abilities to experience the unique freshwater habitat at Antonelli Pond, trails, scenic overlooks, and picnic areas. Project benefits to natural resources will include restoration of riparian woodland habitat at an existing eroded bank. The proposed trail surfacing also provides multi-benefits as it will meet the stability requirements of accessibility standards, providing a hard surface for people of all physical abilities, but also is pervious allowing rainwater to penetrate and reduces heat island effect which are features not typically provided by other hardscape materials.

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

Outreach for the project occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic and thus was limited to virtual engagement and included an online survey, virtual video tour of the project site and proposed plans, and an online virtual meeting. Signage was installed at the project site to inform existing users of the proposed project. The project is supported by the Santa Cruz Commission on Disabilities (County Board of Supervisors) and City of Santa Cruz Public Works Department.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

**Coastal Conservancy**

**\$530,000**

Land Trust of Santa Cruz County	\$65,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$595,00</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code 75001 *et seq.* (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote access to the coastal resources of the State and are consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Section 31000 *et seq.* Proposition 84 specifically allocates Conservancy funding for Monterey Bay and its watersheds, which under Section 75072.5, are defined to include rivers and streams in Santa Cruz County.

Public Resources Code Section 75060(e) allocates funds to the Conservancy for the protection of Monterey Bay and its watersheds. “Protection,” as defined in the Public Resources Code Section 75005(m), includes “actions necessary to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources and includes acquisition, development, restoration, preservation and interpretation”. “Development” is defined in the Public Resources Code Section 75005(f) to include physical improvement of real property; “interpretation” is defined to include visitor serving amenities that increase understanding and enjoyment of natural resources. Consistent with these provisions, the proposed project will design an all-access trail along Antonelli Pond to increase accessibility for people with disabilities, while upgrading existing visitor-serving amenities such as pond overlooks, a picnic area and pond access, and adding signs and interpretative displays.

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation, as discussed in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section below. The proposed project is thus consistent with the funding requirements of Proposition 84.

The LTSCC will provide \$65,000 in cash match funding from a private donation for the project. In addition, LTSCC will provide \$10,000 in in-kind services through volunteers who will partake in the operations and maintenance of the proposed trail and amenities. Match funding described here is provided as an estimate as the Conservancy does not typically require matching funds nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders. Typical grant conditions require Grantees to provide any funds needed to complete the project.

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

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access to and enjoyment of coastal resources. Public Resources Code, Section 31400 states that it is the Legislature’s intent that the Conservancy play a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline. Section 31409 states that, consistent with the Conservancy’s authority to develop a system of public accessways to and along the coast, the Conservancy may award grants to establish or expand inland trails that link to the California Coastal Trail.

Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will create an all-access trail at Antonelli Pond, connecting pedestrians and bicyclists to the California Coastal Trail and coastal access points.

**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 expand opportunities for access for people with disabilities to and along the coast and coastal trails.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will construct visitor-serving amenities at Antonelli Pond including a picnic area and shoreline access.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed project is the subject of the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Antonelli Pond Accessible Trail Project (Exhibit 4), which the City of Santa Cruz adopted on December 2, 2021. On the same day, the City of Santa Cruz determined that the proposed project will not have significant impacts on the environment as mitigated and approved the project. The IS/MND indicated that the project could have potentially significant effects on the following types of resources: Biological Resources, Hydrology and Water Quality, and Recreation, and identifies mitigation measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate all the possible significant environmental effects to less than significant.

The potentially significant impacts of the project and associated mitigation measures are summarized below:

**Biological Resources**

- a) Special Status Species: Ground disturbance during construction of the proposed project could directly affect California red-legged frogs and San Francisco dusky-footed woodrats if any individuals are present at the time of construction. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 and BIO-2 would reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level.

MITIGATION MEASURE BIO-1 requires measures to avoid and minimize potential impacts to listed California red-legged frog, which includes pre-construction surveys by a qualified biologist, training for construction personnel, monitoring during construction, proper trash disposal, and maintaining a distance of at least 100 feet from riparian habitat for any equipment or vehicles maintenance, refueling, or staging.

MITIGATION MEASURE BIO-2 requires measures to avoid and minimize impacts to San Francisco dusky-footed woodrat nests, including pre-construction surveys for woodrat nests by a qualified biologist prior to construction and if any nests are observed within the limits of work, the work area shall be either revised to avoid impacting the nest or a woodrat relocation program shall be developed and implemented by a qualified biologist.

- b) Riparian and Sensitive Habitats: The proposed project will remove a small amount (0.28 acres) of riparian woodland habitat and also could result in indirect impacts to riparian



habitat due to inadvertent disturbance during construction. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-3 and BIO-4 would reduce the impacts to a less-than-significant level.

MITIGATION MEASURE BIO-3 requires LTSCC to prepare and implement a Riparian Mitigation and Monitoring Plan that provides a 1:1 habitat replacement for temporary impacts and 2:1 habitat replacement for permanent impacts (0.28 acres), including in-kind habitat replacement for removal of riparian habitat.

MITIGATION MEASURE BIO-4 requires measures to protect the riparian woodland, freshwater marsh and open water of the pond from inadvertent impacts during construction, including installation of temporary construction fencing and silt fencing at the limit-of-work areas and no material shall be stockpiled, stored, or side cast outside the limit of-work fencing.

- c) Wetlands: Development of the trail improvements could result in inadvertent transport of sediment and construction materials into Antonelli Pond's freshwater marsh and open water wetland areas. With implementation of project-proposed erosion control measures, indirect impacts to Antonelli Pond would be avoided or minimized, resulting in a less-than-significant impact.
- d) Wildlife Movement/Nesting: The project will remove one non-native, horticultural tree, and additionally construction activities and removal of vegetation has the potential to impact nesting birds directly and indirectly, if any are present, potentially resulting in the destruction or abandonment of nests by parent birds, and death to eggs or nestlings. Implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-5 would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

MITIGATION MEASURE BIO-5 requires that all ground disturbances (including vegetation removal) shall occur outside the bird-breeding season on the Central California Coast, which is September 1 to February 1. If project activities are scheduled during the nesting season (February 1 through September 1), a focused survey for active nests of such birds shall be conducted by a qualified biologist and additional measures apply.

- e) Conflicts with Local Ordinances –Tree Removal: Project construction will result in the removal of one heritage tree, a non-native ornamental plum tree. Implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-6 would reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.

MITIGATION MEASURE BIO-6 requires replacement of one heritage tree identified for removal with planting six (6) 15-gallon trees or two (2) 24-inch trees.

Hydrology and Water Quality: Project construction could result in erosion and inadvertent transport of construction debris into Antonelli Pond, resulting in water quality degradation if standard Best Management Practices (BMPs) are not implemented. Implementation of Mitigation Measure HYDRO-1 would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

MITIGATION MEASURE HYDRO-1 requires implementation of erosion control measures during project construction as proposed, including, but not limited to: conducting work prior to the rainy season if possible and protecting disturbed areas during the rainy season and immediately revegetating disturbed areas. Require temporary fencing on the perimeter of the site adjacent to Antonelli Pond during construction to prevent inadvertent erosion and

offsite transport of sediments or construction materials into the pond. Locate all construction equipment, soils and other materials in upland areas away from the pond.

Recreation: The proposed trail improvements could result in potentially significant impact to biological resources and water quality, as discussed above; however mitigation measures BIO1-5 and HYDRO-1 would reduce these impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Conclusion:

Staff has independently evaluated the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Antonelli Pond Accessible Trail Project adopted by the City of Santa Cruz on December 2, 2021 and 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 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 Title 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15382.

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