

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
May 5, 2022

PEDRO POINT HEADLANDS STEWARDSHIP - AUGMENTATION

Project No. 17-036-01
Project Manager: Hilary Hill

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$48,000 to Pacifica Land Trust to augment a previously authorized Conservancy grant of \$41,800 for community-based habitat restoration and trail enhancement at Pedro Point Headlands in San Mateo County.

LOCATION: Pedro Point Headlands, San Mateo County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [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 forty-eight thousand dollars (\$48,000) to Pacifica Land Trust (“the grantee”) to augment the Conservancy grant of \$41,800, authorized on January 18, 2018, for community-based habitat restoration and trail enhancement at Pedro Point Headlands in San Mateo 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 a landowner access agreement from the City of Pacifica has been secured.

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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Pacifica Land Trust is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of \$48,000 to the Pacifica Land Trust to augment an existing Conservancy grant, authorized January 18, 2018, for community-based habitat restoration and trail enhancement on Conservancy- and City of Pacifica-owned property at Pedro Point Headlands in Pacifica, San Mateo County. The proposed authorization would enable the Pacifica Land Trust to continue implementing this stewardship project for an additional period of time. This work is vital to keeping trails open and restoring habitat on this spectacular 255-acre, publicly-owned property.

Pedro Point Headlands contains around two miles of trails that provide expansive and jaw-dropping views of the adjacent ocean and coastline, as well as tranquil paths through thriving native habitat. Due to its location immediately adjacent to the City of Pacifica, the property provides easy access to open space and recreational opportunities for residents in Pacifica as well as regional urban visitors from the greater San Francisco Bay Area. Public visitation and interest in the property has increased since the opening of the popular Devil's Slide Trail, which adjoins the property, as well as during the Covid-19 pandemic when there has been greater interest in outdoor recreation. The existing trails on the property require improvements to keep them open and accessible to the public, such as erosion control during winter months, clearing brush that encroaches on the narrower trails, and removing fallen trees that block trails. Before public ownership, the property was used by an off-road motorcycle club which created landscape scars on the property. Over the last 15 years Pacifica Land Trust's community restoration work on the property has helped restore native habitat for healthy communities of coastal native species. Continued restoration work including native plantings, invasive species removal (such as eradicating French broom, pampas grass, and cape ivy), and erosion/sediment control is required to restore and enhance the property's natural resources.

With Conservancy support, Pacifica Land Trust has successfully enlisted hundreds of volunteers to work at Pedro Point Headlands to address these issues and improve many sections of trail, restore native habitat to heal past misuse of the property, and stabilize areas prone to landslides with native plants. With the proposed authorization, Pacifica Land Trust will continue its work to improve both public access and natural resources at Pedro Point Headlands through its community-based stewardship program. Pacifica Land Trust will continue to accomplish the following tasks with the proposed Conservancy authorization:

- Host monthly volunteer workdays for habitat and trail enhancement and offer additional educational programs to the community.
- Repair existing trails to improve visitor safety and comfort, including erosion control, installing water bars, minor rerouting, and trimming back encroaching vegetation.
- Revegetate landscape scars caused by previous off-road vehicle use, control invasive plants, and prevent further erosion.

The project builds on 15 years of restoration efforts at Pedro Point Headlands including investments made by the Conservancy, State Parks, and San Mateo County to restore habitat and provide public access on the property. The Conservancy's long-term goal for the portion of Pedro Point Headlands it owns is to convey the property to a park management entity, pursuant to the Pedro Point Headlands Implementation Plan approved by the Conservancy on March 26, 2015. However, the Conservancy currently lacks a willing park management entity to take ownership of the property for long-term management. Until one is secured, Pacifica Land Trust's work on the property helps to restore natural resources and maintain public access at Pedro Point Headlands, while also supporting Pacifica Land Trust's mission to preserve, protect and enhance the natural, scenic, recreational, and open space environment surrounding Pacifica for present and future generations.

Site Description: Pedro Point Headlands is a large promontory located at the southern edge of the City of Pacifica, 15 miles south of San Francisco. Pedro Point Headlands rises almost vertically from the ocean to a height of 625 feet, where the bluff-tops provide a spectacular view of the coastline north to Point Reyes, south to Devil's Slide, and east to Montara Mountain and the Santa Cruz Mountains. Of the 255-acres of publicly-owned open space, the only level land is found at the top of the ridgelines and the floor of the main valley. Protected public land extends directly to the south at coastal Devil's Slide County Park, opened to the public in 2014 (Exhibit 1). Trails with remarkable views run along these level bluff-top areas and down through the valley, connecting to a six-foot-wide trail that runs parallel to Highway One. Future Coastal Trail alignment for the property will utilize this existing informal trail to connect the City of Pacifica from the north to 1.2 miles of existing paved Coastal Trail at Devil's Slide County Park to the south. When completed, this section of Coastal Trail will connect 7 miles of existing Coastal Trail segments in Pacifica to the Coastal Trail at Devil's Slide. Nearby Pacifica State Beach, also known as Linda Mar, is a 0.75 mile crescent shaped beach popular regionally for families and surfers.

Aside from its recreational value, the Pedro Point Headlands provide habitat for coastal species. Its usefulness as wildlife habitat is enhanced by its proximity to other open spaces and protected lands. The Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project rates the Pedro Point Headlands as an "area essential to the Conservation Goals" of the Santa Cruz Mountains North landscape unit, and the Association of Bay Area Governments designated Pedro Point Headlands as a Priority Conservation Area (PCA) in 2015 as part of Plan Bay Area. The lands owned by the Conservancy and the City host healthy communities of native vegetation, including a secluded area of reed-grass prairie, which has been identified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as a rare plant community type.

While a small portion of the Pedro Point Headlands is privately owned and developed with houses, the remainder is publicly-owned open space. The Conservancy owns approximately 98 acres and the City of Pacifica owns an adjacent 157 acres at Pedro Point Headlands, which it purchased with Conservancy funding (Exhibit 1). Prior to public ownership the property was utilized by an off-road Motorcycle Club that created landscape scars through off-road use. Under threat of residential development, acquisition of the property was completed in phases: the City of Pacifica's 157-acre portion was acquired in 1992 and the Conservancy's 98-acre portion acquired in 1995. The Conservancy intended to be an interim land-owner until a long-term park management entity could take the property. In 2015, the Conservancy approved the Pedro Point Headlands Implementation Plan to transfer the property to San Mateo County Parks, however the County rescinded its interest in the property due to capacity concerns for its operations and management. No identified potential long-term land owner for the property is yet willing to take ownership of the property.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: For 15 years, Pacifica Land Trust has been crucial in the restoration, trails, and public access improvements, and maintenance of Pedro Point Headlands. Pacifica Land Trust has a record of success carrying out the project as it is successfully implementing its existing grant from the Conservancy, which this authorization would augment. Pacifica Land Trust has also successfully secured and completed previous grants at Pedro Point Headlands including: a \$350,000 grant from San Mateo County completed in 2018 for trail improvements and volunteer habitat restoration; a \$1.1 million Off- Highway Vehicle (OHV) restoration grant from California State Parks and Recreation completed in 2017 to curtail continuing erosion; and a \$204,585 grant from the Conservancy authorized in 2007 as part of a Community-Based, Educational, Environmental, Restoration, and Trail Projects Grant Round. Pacifica Land Trust is well suited to carry out this work due to its long history at the site, local members, and its well-qualified Stewardship Coordinator on staff who is retired from the East Bay Municipal Utility District parks system and has extensive expertise in volunteer coordination, plant, animal, and insect identification, and trail building and maintenance.

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 accomplishes 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 proposed project is a good investment of state resources because the community-based stewardship program at Pedro Point Headlands will (1) restore and/or enhance the significant resources at Pedro Point Headlands including coastal access and natural resources, (2) provide

opportunities for community members to engage in local stewardship, (3) leverage volunteer work to accomplish the project, (4) build on prior State investments in the property to restore degraded native habitat, and (5) improve Conservancy-owned land at Pedro Point Headlands.

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 2017 the Conservancy sent letters to California Native American tribes in San Mateo County inquiring if any tribes would like to initiate tribal consultation on the proposed project and no tribes responded. The Conservancy is beginning to explore if tribes have other potential interests in the property that the Conservancy may be able to support or partner on in the future.

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

Enhancement of habitat at Pedro Point Headlands will improve landscape-scale connectivity, increasing suitable habitat that can provide resilience to species and native habitats during future changes in climate. In addition, trail improvements undertaken by the proposed project that address erosion, such as the creation of water bars or minor re-routes, will increase the longevity of trails on the property. Volunteer participation in the project will also increase engagement and connection to the property, to promote long-term stewardship of the property by community members.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will deliver multiple benefits and significant positive impact at Pedro Point Headlands by: restoring native habitats; maintaining biodiversity by reducing invasive species; protecting sensitive habitat and ensuring public safety by maintaining public access on trails so that environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas are avoided; reducing erosion to protect water quality; maintaining public access to open space and coastal vistas; and providing community engagement opportunities.

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

Pacifica Land Trust brings hundreds of volunteers from around the San Francisco Bay Area to participate in stewardship efforts, including middle schools, high schools, corporations, Boy and Girl Scouts, and the general public. Participants are provided the opportunity to engage in stewardship at Pedro Point Headlands. The broad level of support for environmental restoration and trail-work activities at the Pedro Point Headlands is indicated by the large numbers of people that have participated in the stewardship program. Pedro Point Headlands is a well-loved open space to the people from the greater San Francisco Bay Area, as it's a popular destination to hike the trails and view the scenic coastal vistas from the property on weekends.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$48,000
Others	\$0
Project Total	\$48,000

The Conservancy funds for the project are expected to come from an appropriation from the Conservancy’s Coastal Access Account (Public Resources Code Section 30620.2). Coastal Access Account funds are derived from coastal development permit application fees required by the California Coastal Commission. Coastal Access Account funds may be used for grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the development, maintenance, and operation of new or existing facilities that provide public access to the coast. Pedro Point Headlands borders the Pacific Ocean, and the project will enhance trails to provide greater access to the San Mateo County coastline.

Pacifica Land Trust will provide in-kind services consisting of volunteer trail and habitat enhancement on the property. The value of these services is estimated to be approximately \$29,000. The extent and value of the in-kind services are provided as estimates and will not be required. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or documentation of in-kind services. 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 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, Sections 31160-31165, to address the natural resource and recreational goals of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Under Section 31162(d), the Conservancy may provide grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area for projects that enhance open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes. The proposed project will enhance natural resources and public access at Pedro Point Headlands, an open space and natural area on the San Mateo Coast that is within a short drive of the urban population of the Bay Area.

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

Consistent with **Goal 4, Objective A**, the proposed project will support an educational volunteer program that improves understanding and promotes stewardship of coastal resources through on-the-ground work days at Pedro Point Headlands where volunteers restore habitat and trails.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, the proposed project will result in the restoration and enhancement of coastal scrub habitat on the Pedro Point Headlands property.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from review of impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15304 (minor alterations to land) and 15301 (minor alteration of existing facilities).

Section 15304 exempts minor public or private alterations in the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy mature scenic trees. The proposed project involves community members using hand tools to remove exotic species, grow and plant native species, and enhance trails. The project will remove trees that may block trails or appear to be an imminent danger to trail users, but will not remove healthy scenic trees nor will the project involve removal of species that would require permits from regulatory agencies.

Section 15301 exempts operation, repair, maintenance, and minor alteration of existing structures, facilities and topographical features involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond existing conditions. The trail improvements of this project will be done on existing trails to address erosion and will involve negligible expansion of use.

Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file Notices of Exemption.