

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 22, 2022

**Bay Area Ridge Trail Council Multi-Year Planning**

Project No. 04-085-06  
Avra Heller/Virgilio Cuasay

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council for planning for future Bay Area Ridge Trail projects, and to conduct public engagement and outings for underrepresented trail users.

**LOCATION:** Various locations along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (see Exhibit 1)

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EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)

Exhibit 2: [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 one million two hundred thousand dollars (\$1,200,000) to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (RTC) (“the grantee”) for planning for future Bay Area Ridge Trail projects throughout the nine county San Francisco Bay Area region, and to conduct public engagement and outings for underrepresented trail users.

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.

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 Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council 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 that the Conservancy grant \$1,200,000 to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (Ridge Trail Council/RTC) for planning for future Bay Area Ridge Trail projects throughout the nine county San Francisco Bay Area region, and to conduct public engagement and outings for underrepresented trail users. The vision for the Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 550-mile multi-use (serving hikers, mountain bicyclists, and equestrians), continuous trail that rings San Francisco Bay high on the ridgeline. Under the leadership of the Conservancy and the Council, and supported by a diverse group of project participants, the Ridge Trail creates an interconnected system of open space and trails that provides recreational opportunities and scenic views to the public. As of December 2021, the Council reached a milestone of 400 miles of dedicated (“officially opened”) Ridge Trail. Overall, more than two-thirds (73%) of the ultimate Ridge Trail loop is dedicated, and about one-third of the route remains to be completed. However, trail progress across the region has been variable. Counties in the central parts of the Ridge Trail loop boast both higher rates of completion and longer continuous stretches. Areas in the far north and far south have more gaps to close.

In 2020, RTC completed a Gap Analysis and Action Plan (copies available by contacting the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council), which included a study of 152 remaining gaps, many of which have formidable challenges. The plan details strategies to accelerate completion of all remaining gaps, and focused area studies looking at multi-use gaps in East Bay Regional Park District (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties), connections at the Marin-Sonoma border, on either side of Sonoma Mountain (Sonoma County), around the Carquinez Strait (Solano and Contra Costa Counties), and around North Coyote Valley and between Mount Umunhum and Gilroy (Santa Clara County). These most critical gaps will be the focus of this multi-year planning grant.

Much of the variation in completion rates in different counties is associated with land ownership patterns. Over 90% of the dedicated trail is on public lands, primarily park and open space district lands, and only 7% of the existing trail crosses private land. For the planned route, however, just over 40% crosses public land, one-third of the route crosses private property, and another quarter crosses land owned by land trusts, utility districts, or multiple owners.

Creating a connected regional multi-use path open to all user groups (hikers, mountain bicyclists, equestrians, and runners) is part of the Ridge Trail’s core purpose, though it requires persistence and diplomacy at times to reach agreement on shared use. About three-quarters of

the 400-mile dedicated route is open to all user groups (298 miles) and about one-quarter has a “use gap” for either equestrians or cyclists. Currently, 350 miles are open to equestrians and 339 miles are open to cyclists.

This authorization would advance planning for the future completion of the remaining 150 miles of Ridge Trail segments by continuing identification and refinement of the trail route, negotiating and developing agreements for the acquisition of property from willing sellers (including fee title and trail easements), designing and engineering trail segments, addressing needed Ridge Trail signage, and preparing and reviewing environmental review documents, maps and permit applications. Specifically, the proposed project seeks to dedicate over 35 new miles of the primary trail alignment of the Ridge Trail (the main continuous trail encircling the Bay Area) by funding the Council’s technical support of the local cities, counties, nonprofit organizations, and park and open space agencies that construct and manage the trail segments (See Exhibit 1).

Additional specific goals of the proposed planning project will be to: 1) plan for approximately five miles of Ridge Trail to specifically serve disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged communities; 2) participate with conservation and park organizations to integrate trail alignments with wildlife crossings to improve both wildlife connectivity and trail safety over obstacles such as highways and railroads (see Map 2, Exhibit 1); 3) fabricate and install wayfinding and identifications signs; and 4) close multi-use gaps in the trail so that all users (including cyclists or equestrians) are included. In addition, the Ridge Trail seeks to integrate its planning efforts with other regional and state trail planning organizations, such as the Bay Area Trails Collaborative, Great California Delta Trail, and Juan Bautista de Anza Trail, to ensure regional trail connectivity. Finally, the Ridge Trail will continue to promote long-distance/overnight trekking so that various trail group users (hiking, equestrian, biking) can undertake multi-day journeys.

RTC has been increasing their Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion work and are working to ensure that the trail creates a sense of belonging for communities that have historically had poor access to nature and trails. To that end as part of this multi-year planning grant, RTC will partner with community-based organizations to provide guided trail outings for individuals and families who have been historically underrepresented or excluded from outdoor spaces. To coordinate this outreach, the Ridge Trail collaborates with land managers, park districts, and outdoor suppliers like REI, and is developing relationships with 10-15 community organizations that focus on bringing Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) people into natural areas with guided hikes and other trail outings. RTC is cultivating partnerships with diverse community groups such as the 510 Hikers, Saved by Nature, the Siena Youth Center, and Justice Outside.

RTC planning will focus on closing gaps in and near economically disadvantaged communities and creating new trail connections, including community access trails connecting underserved communities to the Ridge Trail. The planned Ridge Trail route runs in or near eight Severely Disadvantaged Communities (SDACs) in four counties. Six Ridge Trail sections are within a half-mile of SDACs, and two are located within one mile of SDACs, including:

- Ridge Trail Connections South of Trione-Annadel State Park (Sonoma County)

- Ridge Trail/Vine Trail connections (Napa County)
- Vallejo Bluffs, Crockett, Crockett Hills, and Martinez on the Carquinez Strait Scenic Loop Trail (Solano County)
- Coyote Creek Trail (Santa Clara County)

In order to increase underserved community engagement with the trail, RTC will create a publicly-accessible map showing the locations of all transit stops within SDAC communities that are ¼ mile to ½ mile from the Ridge Trail. RTC will also create maps highlighting community access trails or routes that connect from underserved communities to Ridge Trail access points. And, as discussed above, RTC will increase outreach and collaboration with community representative organizations and invite underrepresented people to all its annual events.

**Site Description:** The proposed project will support development of a regional trail along the Bay Area Ridge Trail alignment, which includes ridgetops throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay area (see Exhibit 1).

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:**

Since its inception in 1987, the primary purpose of the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (RTC), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been to plan, promote, acquire, build, and maintain the Ridge Trail. RTC's governing structure was designed to ensure an ongoing public-private partnership with public agencies and trail enthusiasts. The RTC has a membership base of approximately 4,470 people and over 500 volunteer workers who regularly participate in its work. These aspects of the RTC make it uniquely qualified to carry out activities necessary to develop or make accessible new segments of the Ridge Trail.

**Summary of Past Conservancy Investment:**

Since 1998 the Conservancy has provided 6 planning grants to the RTC, totaling over seven and a half million dollars as summarized below:

\* In August 1998, following the first appropriation of funds for the San Francisco Bay Area Program, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$300,000 to the RTC to prepare trail construction plans and negotiate trail easements to make eight specific Ridge Trail segments open to the public.

\* In December 2000, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$3,427,800 to the RTC, \$1,527,800 of which was used for planning and other work to support projects, and \$1,900,000 of which was authorized for construction and acquisition grants for individual projects. As a result of this 2000 grant, RTC planned approximately 100 miles of trail along 60 segments, constructed 66 miles of trail as part of 14 projects, and secured 16.8 miles of the trail alignment.

\* In December 2004, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$1,200,000 to the RTC to perform planning activities for future Ridge Trail projects, resulting in approximately 78 miles of newly planned trail along 70 segments; 52 new miles of trail dedicated and opened along 13 segments; secured about 74 miles of the trail alignment; installed interpretive signs; and conducted database and mapping work. The Conservancy also awarded funds to Ridge Trail site managers for specific projects, authorizing \$2,287,140 to design and construct approximately 23 and 11 miles of Ridge Trail, respectively.

\* In May 2010, the Conservancy approved a grant of \$1,200,000 to the RTC for additional planning. As a result of this 2010 grant, RTC dedicated 39 new miles along 19 segments, and proceeded to plan a variety of segments totaling over 100 miles, preparing another 40 miles of primary Ridge Trail and 12 connector miles for construction. During the period of this 2010 grant, the Conservancy also awarded 16 grants to Ridge Trail site managers for specific projects totaling \$2,418,150, plus grants for three larger-scale projects that involved the Ridge Trail, to design and construct approximately 16 and 23 miles of Ridge Trail, respectively.

\* In December 2015, the Conservancy awarded RTC \$765,000 for additional planning activities. As a result of the 2015 grant, the Ridge Trail Council dedicated 19 miles including 15 new miles and 4 miles that were upgraded to full multi-use; and worked on active planning efforts for a wide variety of trails across the region, totaling about 125 miles. In addition, these efforts helped facilitate the Conservancy's funding five Ridge Trail planning and implementation projects during this period, totaling over \$1.8 million dollars, including a \$1 million grant for public access improvements on Mount Umunhum..

\* The most recent Bay Area Ridge Trail Council planning grant was awarded in March 2019 and just closed in August of 2022. The award included \$560,000 in Prop 68 general funds and \$125,000 in Prop 68 SDAC funds. With these funds, the Ridge Trail Council dedicated 25 miles of the trail, reaching a major milestone of 400 dedicated miles, out of the total 550-mile goal alignment. RTC planning efforts also helped facilitate the Conservancy's support of three Ridge Trail partner grants, totaling an additional \$525,000 invested into Ridge Trail completion

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, 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 Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, as well as numerous regional and local plans including the San Francisco Bay Area's regional Priority Conservation Area program, all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and dozens of local plans and policies.

The California State Legislature passed a resolution in 1990 to "recognize the value of the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the people of the Bay Area and encourage the creation of trails in the San Francisco Bay Area." The Ridge Trail enjoys widespread recognition and support among State, regional and local governments, stakeholders, advocacy groups and the public. The Ridge Trail Council has a base of 4,000 members and volunteers who participate in trail advocacy, building, stewardship, and public events. (See project letters in Exhibit 2).

The Conservancy has played a major role in supporting completion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail; without Conservancy participation, the majority of RTC's work could not occur, and region-wide planning for completion of the Ridge Trail could become fragmented and/or halt altogether.

**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 Ridge Trail route is within the ancestral home of many California tribes. In recent years RTC and land management partners have increasingly engaged tribes in design, access, and naming of public spaces and new trails. A couple examples of this tribal engagement include the new park Patwino Worrta Dodoi Dihi (formerly Rockville Preserve) which was named by the Patwin people (it means Southern Rock Home in the ancestral language of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation). Solano Land Trust reached out to the tribe and is partnering with them to recognize and include land acknowledgement and accurate historical information in signage, communications, and other project information at each juncture of trail development. Mount Umunhum is another example of including and elevating Ridge Trail partnership with a California tribe. Umunhum is the Ohlone word for hummingbird or "resting place of the hummingbird," a central figure in the creation story of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Midpeninsula Open Space Trust negotiated a cultural conservation easement with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and worked with them to enable traditional stewardship and cultural practices on ancestral land and co-management of their ancestral lands and natural resources. In this partnership the Tribe was involved early on an ongoing basis in site planning and design, creating a space for hosting ceremonies, and were deeply involved in the public education and outreach and site storytelling.

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

The Bay Area Ridge Trail is aligned high on the ridgetops encircling San Francisco Bay. The proposed project will therefore not be vulnerable to the sea level rise. Additionally, the Ridge Trail endeavors to provide alternatives to motorized transportation and in general seeks to implement low-maintenance, sustainable trail design and materials that lower the life cycle emissions of the trail.

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

The Bay Area Ridge Trail is a regional trail running through all nine Bay Area counties. In addition, the spectacular scenic views, opportunities for extended trips and connectivity to other trail systems, parks and natural areas enhance the appeal of the Ridge Trail as a destination for visitors from outside the Bay Area.

This ongoing project provides co-benefits and alleviates multiple stressors within communities, such as improving public health, addressing the need for additional recreational amenities, reductions in pollution burden, access to parks and open space, habitat enhancement, or other environmental benefits.

As mentioned in the Project Summary above, RTC planning will focus on increasing equitable access to the Bay Area Ridge Trail by focusing on closing gaps in and near economically disadvantaged communities and creating new trail connections, including community access

trails connecting underserved communities to the Ridge Trail. Additionally, RTC will host at least 2-3 guided hikes annually, specifically in partnership with underserved communities, on properties not easily accessible to underserved communities.

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

The Ridge Trail Council works in close partnership with park agencies and local governments, land trusts, landowners, other stakeholders, and volunteers to plan, acquire, design, build, care for, promote, and protect the Ridge Trail. Support from partners including the National Park Service and many regional park and open space districts and land trusts has been integral to establishing the Ridge Trail and its continued success.

Almost one-third of the planned RT route crosses private property. About half crosses agricultural or grazing land, and about one-third is “mixed-use.” Private property gaps are often the most difficult to close. To address this RTC staff will work closely with partners and private landowners to assess the feasibility of acquisitions or trail easements across the properties. If primary alignment is not feasible, RTC staff will work with landowners adjacent to the properties to assess the viability of alternative routes.

The wide range of partners and volunteer groups that work with the RTC result in a remarkable level of support and coordination in developing trail opportunities. The RTC regularly works with dozens of local agencies, non-profits, private corporations, local advocates, political leaders, landowners, and citizen groups in making the trail a reality. Some of these planning teams included the Peninsula Trail Team (PTT) where RTC staff hold monthly meetings with partners to accelerate trail connectivity, the Conservation Lands Network (especially for the North Bay), Bay Area Trails Collaborative (BATC), TOGETHER Bay Area Policy Committee, and the East Bay Trail User Working Group which particularly focuses on partner coordination, multi-use trail development, and trail user conflict resolution.

To develop strong community support, the Council forms local committees comprised of members, advocates, and stakeholders (“Trail Advocacy Groups” or TAGs) all around the region. Due to the strategic importance of accelerating Ridge Trail progress in high-gap areas (Sonoma, Napa, and Santa Clara Counties), this grant will focus on building and supporting more robust TAGs in the North and South Bay. These groups help extend staff capacity to create and deepen community connections, conduct outreach, engage with partners and opinion leaders, and plan and host trail outings and stewardship events.

This project received 18 letters of support from the following elected officials and major open space management organizations: Congressman Jared Huffman, Congressman Mike Thompson, Congressman Mark DeSaulnier, California State Senators Dave Cortese and Bill Dodd, California State Assemblymembers Kevin Mullin and Matt Haney, Napa County Supervisor Ryan Gregory, Sonoma County Supervisor, Susan Gorin, as well as the City of San Jose, the East Bay Regional Park District, Midpeninsula Open Space District, Marin County Parks, Napa County Regional Parks and Open Space District, Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department, Sonoma County Regional Parks, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, and Together Bay Area.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,200,000</b>
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council	\$1,670,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$2,865,000</b>

Conservancy funding is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of climate resilience. These funds may be used for the purposes of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21) and nonmotorized trails of statewide significance. (Section 52 of Budget Trailer Bill SB 155 (2021).) The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it will plan segments of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, a non-motorized trail of statewide significance and a trail that helps achieve the goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

The Ridge Trail Council anticipates matching Conservancy funds with funding secured from a mix of other grants, institutional and individual gifts.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

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

Pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code, the Conservancy may fund and undertake plans and feasibility studies and may award grants to nonprofit organizations for these purposes. The proposed project consists of funds awarded to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, a nonprofit grantee, to undertake plans and feasibility studies for implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

Pursuant to Chapter 4.5 Section 31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to improve public access to, within, and around the ridgetops, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife. Consistent with Section 31162(a), the proposed project will enable the RTC to plan for development and implementation of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, a regional ridgetop trail system located entirely within the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. As required by Section 31162(a), the proposed project is consistent with the rights of private property owners because Ridge Trail segments are only built with the permission of property owners over which the trail is located. In addition, Ridge Trail projects will be designed to not have a significant impact on agricultural operations, environmentally sensitive areas, or wildlife. Any future trail development projects resulting from this proposed planning grant will require future environmental review.



Consistent with Section 31163(a), the RTC cooperates with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area.

Finally, the proposed project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) for the following reasons:

The proposed project is supported by adopted local and regional plans. The Ridge Trail is specifically recognized in the California Recreational Trail Plan, the San Francisco Bay Area's regional Priority Conservation Area Plan, by the East Bay Regional Park District, by all nine Bay Area County General or Master Trail Plans, in all relevant regional park and open space district plans, and in many other local plans and policies.

The proposed project is multi-jurisdictional and serves a regional constituency by contributing toward the completion of a regional trail system that links ridgetops throughout the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area.

The proposed project can be implemented in a timely manner, because the proposed project supports RTC's continuing efforts, which are ready to proceed due to previous Conservancy planning authorizations (See Project History, above).

The proposed project provides benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented, as there is current momentum built from the work supported by the previous Conservancy grants.

The proposed project leverages matching funds from several sources, both public and private. (See Project Financing, above).

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

Consistent with **Goal 13, Objective F** of the Conservancy's 2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will plan for the development of approximately 35 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

Consistent with **Goal 13, Objective A**, this authorization will help develop a plan for projects that provide recreational facilities such as picnic areas, parking lots, and interpretive signs as part of developing Ridge Trail staging areas.

Consistent with **Goal 13, Objective H** to develop a plan for links between the Ridge Trail and other regional trails.

Consistent with **Goal 11, Objective A**, this project will update plans that help the Conservancy identify and prioritize resource and recreational goals, including projects that improve public access.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed authorization is to fund the preliminary planning work necessary to advance Bay Area Ridge Trail projects, including identifying and refining the trail route, negotiating and

developing agreements for the acquisition of property, planning and designing specific segments, and preparing environmental review documents, maps, and permit applications.

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to California Code of Regulations Section 15262 (“Feasibility and Planning Studies”) because the proposed project is for feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions which the Conservancy has not approved, adopted, or funded.

The proposed project is also categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations Section 15306 (“Information Collection”) in that it will include basic data collection and resource evaluation activities, including those necessary for planning, designing, and preparing environmental review documents for Ridge Trail projects.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project upon approval.