

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
December 1, 2022

**GARRAPATA STATE PARK COASTAL TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS**

Project No. 22-077-01  
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to the California Department of Parks and Recreation to improve the California Coastal Trail by renovating several trailheads and trails, installing new signage and drainage/erosion protection improvements, and removing informal trails, in Garrapata State Park in Big Sur, Monterey County, and adoption of findings under the California Environmental Quality Act.

**LOCATION:** Garrapata State Park, Big Sur Coast, Monterey County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Photos of Existing Conditions](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Photos of Recent Trail Improvements](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Coastal Trail Improvement Management Plan \(2013\)](#)
  - Exhibit 5: [Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Coastal Trail Improvement Project Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration, including Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan \(2012\); Final Mitigated Negative Declaration and Response to Comments Received \(2012\)](#)
  - Exhibit 6: [Project letters](#)
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

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

Resolution:

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The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000) to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (“the grantee”) to improve the California Coastal Trail by renovating several trailheads and trails, installing new signage and drainage/erosion protection improvements, and removing informal trails, in Garrapata State Park in Big Sur, Monterey 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.

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 public access.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Conservancy has independently reviewed and considered the Draft Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Trail Improvements Project adopted by the California Department of Parks and Recreation on August 24, 2012 pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) and attached to the accompanying staff recommendation as Exhibit 5. 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 up to \$1,000,000 to the California Department of Parks and Recreation (“State Parks”) to construct California Coastal Trail improvements in Garrapata State Park in Big Sur, Monterey County (Exhibit 1). Improving the Coastal Trail in Garrapata State Park is identified as a priority in the Conservancy’s 2003 Completing the

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California Coastal Trail Report, and State Parks's 2013 Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Coastal Trail Improvement Management Plan (Exhibit 4). The proposed improvements will complement two previous trail projects completed in the park in recent years with Conservancy and State Parks funding (Exhibit 3).

In the 1980's, State Parks installed 22 trailheads and an extensive trail network in Garrapata State Park west of Highway 1 that are today, with the exception of recent trail improvements, in various states of disrepair (Exhibit 2). A majority of these accessways are served by poorly marked vehicle turnouts and trailheads located on the western edge of the Highway 1 right of way and are often overlooked by visitors driving through the area.

Located at the northern entrance to the park, the planned improvements include renovating four existing trailheads with redwood steps leading from the Highway 1 turnouts to the trail, and installing signage and rod and cable fencing to delineate the trail (Exhibit 1, page 2). 2,325 feet of trail will be renovated with decomposed granite to a width of three to four feet, a shoreline accessway will be restored with 150 redwood steps, and 3 rocked overlooks similar to others that have been recently installed in the park will be constructed (Exhibit 3). In addition, 4,325 cubic feet of rock will line portions of the improved trail system to elevate the trail where needed to improve drainage of stormwater runoff. In addition, 660 square feet of rock armoring will be placed next to the new steps installed below each of the trailheads to slow stormwater that drains off Highway 1. Over 3,600 feet of user created social trails will be removed to avoid further impacts to these areas, including areas with sensitive cultural resources and federally endangered Smith's blue butterfly habitat. After these improvements are completed the remaining balance of funds will be directed to completing additional trail improvements located immediately to the south at trailhead 4 recommended in the 2013 Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Coastal Trail Improvement Management Plan.

The proposed improvements are recommended in the Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Coastal Trail Improvement Management Plan (Plan). The County of Monterey approved the Plan, issued a coastal development permit for all of the projects identified in the Plan, and made CEQA findings in a Mitigated Negative Declaration in 2014 (Exhibits 4 and 5). Development and approval of the Plan entailed public hearings held by the Monterey County Land Use Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission where members of the local community were given the opportunity to comment. Conservancy staff sent 13 tribal consultation letters in July 2022 and no comments were received.

**Site Description:** The project area is located within Garrapata State Park in northern Big Sur where approximately four miles of rugged coastline extend along 277 acres of coastal terrace seaward of State Highway 1 (Exhibit 1). The park's other 2,600-plus acres are east of Highway 1 and extend up steep hillsides toward the ridgelines of the coast range. The panoramic ocean and open space views along this stretch of the California coast are well known for their drama and scope.

There are 22 existing vehicle turnouts and trailheads or "gates" that are distributed along the four miles of Highway 1 that run through the park. The turnouts are located within the western side of the highway right of way that serve a patchwork of trails spread along the coastal bluffs,

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and in some locations down to pocket coves and sandy beaches. Trails connecting to three of these turnouts/trailheads were improved with Conservancy and State Park funding in 2015-2016 (Exhibit 1, page 3 and Exhibit 3). Some of the existing formal and informal or “social” trails are located within identified archaeological sites that are impacted by accelerated erosion, soil loss, and disturbance from pedestrian use (Exhibit 2). Other segments extend into patches of seacliff buckwheat that provides food and habitat for the federally endangered Smith’s blue butterfly. The buckwheat blooming period generally occurs from June to September which also coincides with periods of higher summer visitor use at the park.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The Monterey District of State Parks worked closely with the Conservancy to successfully plan, permit, and construct a segment of Coastal Trail in Garrapata State Park between 2014 and 2017. The Conservancy regularly provides grants to State Parks, and Conservancy staff often collaborate with Monterey District staff on public access and recreation projects within their coastal park units. Currently, the Monterey District is managing a project with Conservancy funding to design and secure permits for two restrooms in Garrapata State Park. State Parks has a long history of successfully completing high priority projects funded by the Conservancy and has the staff capacity and resources both in their Districts and in their Sacramento offices to manage the proposed Conservancy grant. District staff has confirmed they have a plan for the long-term operation and maintenance of the proposed project.

### **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 Big Sur region attracts thousands of daily visitors from throughout the state, the country, and the world, many of whom seek to access and enjoy the region’s spectacular bluffs and beaches. The proposed project will enhance public access and recreation within Garrapata State Park and protect significant cultural and natural resources.

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

The project has been designed to address coastal bluff erosion and be sustainable for the lifespan of the project and for no less than 20 years. The trail improvements will be maintained to State Parks standards as prescribed in their Trail Handbook.

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

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The proposed improvements are recommended in the [Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Coastal Trail Improvement Management Plan](#). Development and approval of the Plan entailed public hearings held by the Monterey County Land Use Advisory Committee and the Planning Commission where members of the local community were given the opportunity to comment.

### PROJECT FINANCING

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b><u>\$1,000,000</u></b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b><u>\$1,000,000</u></b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funding is a fiscal year 2021 - 2022 appropriation from the General Fund (SB 170, 2021, Chapter 240 of the Statutes of 2021, Section 58) specifically for repair and extension of the Coastal Trail system in Garrapata State Park.

### CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400 - 31410). Section 31400 states that it is the intent of the Legislature that the Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. In order to carry out that mandate, the Conservancy is authorized by Section 31400.1 to provide grants to public entities or non-profits organizations to develop, operate and manage lands for access to and along the coast. Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to provide assistance to public agencies in establishing accessways and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of Division 21.

The proposed project will develop and manage lands for access by repairing and improving the Coastal Trail system to and along the coast in Garrapata State Park. The trail improvements will serve visitors to the Big Sur region along the coast, which attracts thousands of daily visitors. The proposed project will enhance public access and recreation along the coast within Garrapata State Park. The project will serve the recreational needs of residents and visitors to Garrapata State Park that visit from around the state and beyond.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective D** of the Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the project entails the construction of Coastal Trail segments.

### CEQA COMPLIANCE:

For purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), State Parks, as lead agency, adopted the "Final Mitigated Negative Declaration and Response to Comments Received - Garrapata State Park Coastal Habitat Restoration and Trail Improvements Project" (MND) and

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Mitigation and Monitoring Reporting Plan (MMRP) (Exhibit 5), which addresses the environmental impacts of the Plan. The public comment period for the Initial Study/Draft MND lasted from July 13, 2012 to August 13, 2012 (Exhibit 5). One written comment was received from the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans, District 5) stating that any work done in their Highway 1 right-of-way would require an encroachment permit. No other written comments were received.

The scope of the MND, MMRP, and Plan exceed that of the proposed project; the proposed project is included within the scope of those documents. If and when other projects in the Plan are recommended to be funded with Conservancy funds, the Conservancy will at that time evaluate their potential significant environmental impacts.

The impacts of the proposed project and the associated mitigation measures are summarized below. The potential significant environmental impacts of the proposed project and the corresponding mitigations are identified and discussed in greater detail in the MND and MMRP attached as Exhibit 4.

### **Biological Resources**

#### BIO-3: Impact

Impacts to Smith's blue butterflies could occur as a result of restoring and maintaining trails and overlooks and by enhancing and restoring habitat, including removal of invasive, non-native vegetation. Actions could damage or cause a direct loss of seacliff buckwheat, the species host plant. Trail maintenance may result in temporary habitat loss, disturbance, and displacement during such activities. Incidental take of Smith's blue butterflies could occur as a result of recreation and associated activities such as hiking on trails.

#### BIO-3: Mitigation

To avoid, minimize, and compensate for impacts to Smith's blue butterfly, State Parks will implement the following measures:

1. Prior to implementation of project improvements within areas supporting seacliff buckwheat, State Parks will comply with the approved 2012 Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) with USFWS that outlines measures State Parks will implement to achieve measurable benefit to the species. The SHA provides State Parks incidental take coverage for Smith's blue butterflies occupying, and associated with, its host plant (seacliff buckwheat) that could be taken as a result of the proposed project. The SHA authorizes State Parks to incidentally take all Smith's blue butterflies, in any life stage, occupying and associated with a pre-established number of its host plant (seacliff buckwheat), that could be killed or injured as a result of damage to and/or loss of one of those host plants.
2. State Parks will also implement measures to avoid take of the butterfly by minimizing removal of seacliff buckwheat during trail maintenance and improvement activities, and will encourage the establishment of seacliff buckwheat by closing social trails and restoring coastal scrub habitat through the removal and control of invasive, non-native plant species.

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3. DPR will collect seed from seacliff buckwheat for the purpose of planting and/or seeding of buckwheat plants to expand habitat for Smith's blue butterfly within the project area, non-native plant species in coastal scrub supporting seacliff buckwheat will be removed/controlled, and herbicides will not be used.

### BIO-7: Impact

Construction activities may cause short-term impacts to nesting birds if they are present during construction.

### BIO-7: Mitigation

To mitigate for potential impacts to nesting birds, the State Parks will conduct preconstruction surveys to identify any nesting bird locations and then implement buffer zones to protect active nests within the work area.

## **Cultural Resources**

### CULT-2: Impact

Improving, closing or removing trail segments could result in greater disturbance to archaeological resources.

### CULT-2: Mitigation

The State Park Archaeologist or other qualified archaeologist/designee will inspect the location of the planned trail work to confirm the locations where an archaeological monitor will be required. In the event that a potentially significant cultural deposit is uncovered during construction, all work will cease to determine and implement appropriate avoidance, preservation or recovery measures.

### CULT-6: Impact

Excavation for overlook improvements could result in impacts to archaeological resources.

### CULT-6: Mitigation

To avoid impacts to archaeological resources during excavation for overlook improvements, excavation will be limited to the rock wall (6 to 8 inches in depth), wood railing, and bench posts (36 inches in depth maximum), and overlook areas will be capped with aggregate base material.

Based on its independent review of the MND and MMRP, Conservancy staff concurs that the proposed project, as mitigated, will not have a significant effect on the environment. Staff recommends that the Conservancy, based on substantial evidence in the record, make the finding that the project avoids, reduces or mitigates the possible significant environmental effects to a level of less-than-significant effect on the environment as that term is defined by Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 15382. Staff will file a Notice of Determination upon the Conservancy's approval of the project.