

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

SAUNDERS LANDING COASTAL TRAIL PLANNING

Project No. 19-023-02
Project Manager: Fanny Yang

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$82,700 to Mendocino Land Trust to conduct environmental studies and prepare designs and permit applications for establishing 0.4 miles of new Coastal Trail across Saunders Landing, south of the City of Point Arena in Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Support 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 eighty-two thousand seven hundred dollars (\$82,700) to Mendocino Land Trust (“the grantee”) to conduct environmental studies and prepare designs and permit applications for the future establishment of 0.4 miles of Coastal Trail across Saunders Landing south of the City of Point Arena in Mendocino 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. Evidence that the grantee has acquired the Saunders Landing property.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, Mendocino Land Trust 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.
3. The Mendocino 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 the Conservancy authorize a \$82,700 grant to Mendocino Land Trust (MLT) to prepare designs and permit applications, and conduct the environmental studies needed for the preparation of a document that comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the establishment of 0.4 miles of new California Coastal Trail (CCT), referred to as the Saunders Landing Coastal Trail, to be located across Saunders Landing, south of the City of Point Arena.

The Saunders Landing Coastal Trail was identified by the greater Mendocino and Sonoma County communities as an important pathway along the coast; currently there is no trail connection between Hearn Gulch and Schooner Gulch without walking the shoulder of Highway 1. This poses a safety risk for residents and visitors when visiting the coast. The 0.4-mile trail segment to be designed with this project will provide a safer and more accessible alternative recreational route for Mendocino and Sonoma County residents and CCT users when visiting the coast.

The proposed trail connection will be designed to provide connectivity for the CCT across Saunders Landing. Out of Mendocino County's 131 mile shore, about 52 miles or 40 per cent of it, can only be followed along via Highway 1. Once this gap in the CCT is filled, CCT users will be able to travel a contiguous 1 mile section of the trail from the Hearn's Gulch coastal access point to Schooner Gulch without having to utilize Highway 1.

The proposed project will take place after MLT acquires the privately held Saunders Landing property in fee. This will be achieved via funding assistance from California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Caltrans is funding the acquisition in order to conduct wetland and riparian protection and restoration as mitigation for three highway projects in Mendocino County. The property acquisition will allow for the construction of the CCT. The proposed project consists of conducting the environmental studies, including archaeological and biological surveys, that will be needed by the County of Mendocino, which will prepare the environmental review document that complies with CEQA; preparing all necessary permit

applications; and establishing trail layout and designs. The goal is to prepare for construction and opening of a new CCT segment in Mendocino County.

Site Description: Saunders Landing is located approximately 10.2 miles north of the Mendocino/Sonoma County border and six miles south of the city of Point Arena. It consists of two parcels bisected by Highway 1. The western parcel is 8.2 acres of open coastal headlands and the eastern parcel is 3.8 acres containing a bishop pine forest and riparian wetland. The Saunders Landing Coastal Trail will be along the western parcel. Currently, the two parcels are privately held; MLT is on track to acquire the property and secure site control by the end of the year, which will allow for coastal trail planning.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: MLT is experienced and has the capacity to undertake planning, permitting, and design of a new segment of coastal trail. MLT specializes in public access projects and trail development in the region; the organization previously worked on a number of trail development projects with Conservancy funding, such as constructing new coastal trail adjacent to the Ten Mile River Estuary, and at Pelican Bluffs in Mendocino County. MLT's board and staff represents segments of the community throughout Mendocino County and has agreed to be responsible for the long-term maintenance of the trail and to steward the new trail and the surrounding lands.

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 proposed project is a good investment of state resources as it contributes to the State's objective to complete the Coastal Trail system and address trail gaps along the California coast. The proposed project has a reasonable budget covering trail planning and design, CEQA review, and permitting. Future partnerships between MLT, Caltrans, and community members will help maintain the proposed Coastal Trail segment and ensure that state resources put into developing the trail will continue to benefit the public.

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

The proposed project will integrate design elements that protect and conserve coastal resources. This planning phase will ensure that sensitive flora and fauna are identified and protected. The project is expected to continue to deliver recreational and restoration benefits over time as the future trail will not be impacted by sea level rise and will open an alternative pathway for community members to travel along the coast.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The proposed project will plan for a future segment of the Coastal Trail that will serve as a key link for Mendocino coastside residents and visitors. The trail will provide additional space for recreational opportunities, wildlife viewing, and potential educational experiences. Other co-benefits of the proposed project include improving public health by improving access to coastal resources and open space, and habitat restoration work completed by Caltrans at the site.

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

The proposed project was planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support. The proposed project originated from local community members identifying the Saunders Landing property as a key link in the Coastal Trail system. MLT has had early contact with relevant tribal groups and plans to continue keeping all stakeholders apprised of the proposed project as it progresses.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$82,700
Project Total	\$82,700

Conservancy funding for the proposed project is expected to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation to the Conservancy from the General Fund for climate resilience (Budget Act 2022, SB 154). The climate resilience funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021, which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the climate resilience funds, including developing non-motorized trails of statewide significance. The proposed project is consistent with the funding purposes as it is planning for the future development of a segment of the Coastal Trail, which is a trail of statewide significance, and would incorporate climate resilience considerations to enhance trail resiliency.

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 need to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 (Sections 31400 et seq.) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy has a principal role in the implementation of a system of public access ways to and along the state’s coastline. Section 31400.1 authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access purposes to and along the coast. Consistent with these provisions, the recommended grant is to MLT to plan and design 0.4 miles of new public trail along the Mendocino coast. MLT is a non-profit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. The organization’s principle charitable purposes are to focus on public access and protection of

agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, healthy watersheds, and forests. The proposed project is necessary to facilitate development of a new segment of the Coastal Trail along the Mendocino coast. The recommended grant is consistent with Section 31408, which authorizes the Conservancy to coordinate development of the Coastal Trail. The proposed project has involved coordination with Caltrans, which has cooperated with the Conservancy and MLT in planning for Saunders Landing to be available for development of the Coastal Trail.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):

Consistent with **Goal 1.1 Commit Funding to Benefit Systematically Excluded Communities**, the future Coastal Trail segment planned from the proposed project will serve disadvantaged and/or systemically excluded community members from Point Arena and surrounding areas by improving recreational amenities.

Consistent with **Goal 2.3 Accessibility Projects that Reduce Barriers to Coastal Access for People with Disabilities**, the proposed project will design the 0.4 miles segment of Coastal Trail to be accessible for all users.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4 Build Trails**, the proposed project plans for the future construction of 0.4 miles of new Coastal Trail.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project consists of designing a future segment of the Coastal Trail, conducting CEQA review, and preparing permit applications. Thus, the proposed project involves only data gathering, resource evaluation, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. These activities are statutorily exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262, which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded; and categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Consistent with Section 15306, the data collection and resource evaluation components of the project will not cause major or serious disturbance to the environment. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.