

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 14, 2023

**SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA CONSERVANCY PROGRAM:
LAND CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP**

Project No. 08-023-06
Project Manager: Mark Kalnins

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,100,000 to TOGETHER Bay Area to support conservation planning in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Cruz by updating the Conservation Lands Network planning tool, including expanded partner engagement and data updates to support regional biodiversity and habitat resilience.

LOCATION: All nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area, plus the County of Santa Cruz: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, and Sonoma.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [January 21, 2021 Staff Recommendation](#)
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 one million one hundred thousand dollars (\$1,100,000) to TOGETHER Bay Area (“the grantee”) to support conservation planning in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and the County of Santa Cruz by updating the Conservation Lands Network planning tool, including expanded partner engagement and data updates to support regional biodiversity and habitat resilience.

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.

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3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

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. TOGETHER Bay Area 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 grant of up to \$1,100,000 to TOGETHER Bay Area to support conservation planning in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and the County of Santa Cruz by updating the Conservation Lands Network (CLN) planning tool, including expanded partner engagement and data updates to support regional biodiversity and habitat resilience.

The CLN is a Bay Area-wide biodiversity conservation vision, regional strategy, and set of tools for protecting and restoring uplands habitats within the nine county San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Cruz County (Exhibit 1). The CLN has adopted a regional goal of 50% conservation of the Bay Area's uplands by 2050 (50 x 50), which is what TOGETHER Bay Area's members and partners have determined is necessary to allow nature and the Bay Area's flora and fauna to thrive as the effects of climate change will undoubtedly necessitate more rapid, effective, and coordinated conservation actions. The CLN 50x50 regional goal will also advance the State's 30x30 initiative to conserve 30% of land and coastal water in California by 2030. The CLN is an evolution of the Upland Habitat Goals plan and complements the trio of science-based regional plans that include the Bayland Ecosystem Habitat Goals and the Subtidal Habitat Goals. Conservancy staff routinely use the CLN to review and evaluate grant proposals for prioritization of land protection and acquisition, public access, and ecological restoration projects.

The CLN has been supported in part by Conservancy funding since its launch in 2011, with support to create a 2.0 version in 2016, and the most recent grant to fill data gaps about biodiversity in urban habitats in 2021 (Exhibit 2). Since the last full update, TOGETHER Bay Area has identified several areas of need and focus for the next version update. The first is to make sure that the extensive Bay Area conservation community of over 100 public land managers, Tribes, land trusts, resource conservation districts, and other nonprofits and public agencies across different scales and jurisdictions, remain engaged together; that new entities are invited into the process; and that the CLN products remain relevant, well-used, and reflective of local priorities and data while guiding the region toward a cohesive conservation goal. The second

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opportunity is for traditional ecological knowledge to be specifically incorporated into regional goal setting for conservation and stewardship. And the final opportunity is to consider how to incorporate land stewardship, wildfire resilience, and urban biodiversity into our regional goal setting and coordination. Land stewardship includes all the ways humans work to improve the functioning of ecosystems in the face of habitat fragmentation, invasive species, human-wildlife interactions, resource extraction, and effects of drought and extreme weather.

Work under the Conservancy grant will address the opportunities outlined above. Updates to the current version of the CLN will be done first and include creating a progress report and dashboard to track and communicate progress to-date towards meeting regional and habitat conservation goals. The grantee will convene Tribes and technical experts, perform scientific and geospatial analyses, and prepare a GIS database to develop the new CLN 3.0 version. This update will combine spatial data representing environmental features, climate variables, resilience indexes, and other analysis products at a unit scale that is appropriately sized for even the coarsest climate datasets. Summarizing all data values to CLN analysis units will allow the CLN update to show where areas for biodiversity conservation are essential for climate resilience and/or where land stewardship actions could increase climate and wildfire resilience. Once the CLN 3.0 science and data are developed, the grantee will engage the broader conservation community to inform CLN priority actions and mapping, and to facilitate learning and relationship building to accelerate buy-in and action around shared conservation and climate change adaptation goals and strategies. And finally, the grantee will update regional prioritization and information tools (i.e., CLN Explorer and the Bay Area Greenprint) with a new network map and other data and improve their effectiveness and functionality base on end user feedback.

Project outcomes include robust engagement with the public and regional conservation community for prioritization of land protection, acquisition, and stewardship projects. Associated deliverables may include a CLN Progress Report in 2024, CLN End User Feedback Report in 2025, and CLN 3.0 Report in 2028; two CLN Database releases; five Bay Area Protected Areas Database updates; and incorporation of nine county-wide, fine-scale vegetation maps into the CLN modeling in 2027.

Site Description: This planning project will cover the diverse uplands and watersheds of the San Francisco Bay Area (the nine counties that touch the San Francisco Bay, plus Santa Cruz County).

Grant Applicant Qualifications: As a current and long-time grantee of the Conservancy, TOGETHER Bay Area has demonstrated the necessary financial controls, budgeting expertise, and required data and relationships to meet project requirements under a grant agreement. TOGETHER Bay Area, under its previous name, Bay Area Open Space Council, has conducted two similarly-scaled, multi-year planning projects to produce CLN 1.0 (2006-2011) and 2.0 (2016-2019). Working with established partners and our tribal, agency, and nonprofit members, while leveraging the data of the CLN, the project team is ready to tap into the diverse and broad expertise of the TOGETHER Bay Area coalition, along with our shared commitment to improving equity outcomes in our region as a parallel priority to ensuring resilient lands for all.

The grantee contracts with Blue Fox9 Accounting for a contract Chief Financial Officer and bookkeeper, and tracks key performance indicators in a dashboard for monthly monitoring. Finally, the Finance Committee and Executive Committee of the TOGETHER Bay Area Board of Directors provide the necessary oversight of the organization's financial situation.

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 CLN increases the region's ability to deliver on-the-ground projects, primarily acquisitions, but has the potential for restoration, stewardship, and equitable access projects as well. The CLN is used by over 40 organizations and agencies to learn and communicate how their conservation projects and areas contribute to multiple habitat-based regional conservation goals. The CLN products and information tools will provide up-to-date tracking of the State's 30x30 initiative and CLN's regional 50x50 regional goal. With this information, organizations prioritize their acquisitions and strengthen their funding proposals. The CLN 3.0 project will integrate stewardship, wildfire, and urban open space-related regional information and will be designed to facilitate action planning and fund raising in the same way it currently does for acquisition.

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.

Since TOGETHER Bay Area's reforming in 2019, they have been clear and intentional about how important Native Americans are to stewarding land. Four Native-led land trusts are members of their coalition, and they have worked in multiple ways to build members' capacity to be allies and build alliances with Native American Tribes and communities. One example is their Right Relations program in partnership with Native-led Redbud Resource Group. The pilot program which will conclude in June 2023 consists of a 9-month, cohort-based program for learning, community building, and action. As the Right Relations program expands in 2024 and beyond, TOGETHER Bay Area will identify and build connections between the learning and action that happens within that program with what is being developed in the CLN 3.0 project.

In addition, TOGETHER Bay Area will convene a Tribal Advisory Council to help guide the development of CLN 3.0. Clear goals and expectations will be established, while participation from Tribal groups from around the region will be encouraged and facilitated. The TAC will be valuable for the CLN efforts on wildfire resilience and land stewardship, as well as potential land return projects.

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

The benefits of this planning project are an informed, engaged, and energized Bay Area conservation community that is rooted in its robust engagement of the people and organizations who use the CLN information to make conservation decisions and access funding for their work. During this project, the grantee anticipates enlisting approximately 300 existing and new Bay Area land conservation practitioners to help drive the contents and products of the CLN. This focus on engagement is the hallmark of the preceding two CLN planning processes and is the single most important reason the CLN has seen such durable support and use since its launch in 2011.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The CLN supports the State of California’s goal of conserving 30% of land and coastal waters by 2030. In addition to informing on-the-ground decision-making and facilitating fundraising, the CLN acts as a regional vision and guide for advancing time-based, spatially-explicit conservation goals in the same way as the State’s ambitious 30x30 initiative. By consistently pushing to fulfill the CLN’s regional goal of 50% conservation of the Bay Area’s uplands by 2050, TOGETHER Bay Area is helping the State reach its parallel goal sooner.

Project outcomes and benefits include development of new tools for analyzing 8 million terrestrial acres using local expert input, leading to approximately 2.5 million acres of priority lands identified for conservation; and meaningful conservation community-member engagement.

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

TOGETHER Bay Area engages the broader Bay Area conservation community on a regular basis through convenings of its annual conference, Policy Committee, Wildfire Data Working Group, Together Tuesdays webinar program, and others. The input received by the grantee through these convenings is twofold: continue to support the CLN’s existing acquisition-focused habitat goals accounting framework, and at the same time work with the conservation community to develop a complementary regional stewardship framework.

In addition, strong support for this project has manifested in multiple ways. The CLN’s online tools (data downloads and Explorer) remain in continuous demand; the CLN is a priority of TOGETHER Bay Area’s Board of Directors, which is made up of agency, departmental, and nonprofit leaders from around the Bay Area; the CLN is used by regional agencies such as the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture as the definitive source for biodiversity priorities.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$1,100,000
Project Total	\$1,100,000

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from an FY 2022/23 appropriation from the General Fund to the Conservancy for the purpose of climate resilience (The Budget Act of 2022, SB 154). These funds are available as described in Section 52 of Chapter 258 of the Statutes of 2021,

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which sets forth a detailed description of the purposes of the climate resilience funds, including projects for the purpose of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source because it is within the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program established pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

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:

This project is undertaken in accordance with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Under Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants within the Bay Area that achieve the following goals: (a) improve public access to, within and around the San Francisco Bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces; (b) protect natural habitats and connecting corridors; (c) assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments and districts; and (d) promote and assist projects that will provide open space and natural areas accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes. The proposed authorization will provide funding that will allow TOGETHER Bay Area to undertake the planning that is necessary for the selection and implementation of projects within the Bay Area that achieve these objectives.

Section 31163(a) directs the Conservancy to cooperate with local and regional government bodies, non-profit organizations, and other interested parties in identifying and adopting long term resource and recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Section 31163(b) directs the Conservancy to "participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area for the purpose of implementing subdivision 31163(a)", and for "broad-based local involvement in, and support for, the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program". The proposed authorization directly carries out these provisions by funding the work of TOGETHER Bay Area (comprising many public and non-profit entities) in refining priority areas for conservation (long-term resource goals) and generating diverse public support for protection of San Francisco Bay.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) in that (1) it is supported by a multitude of local and regional plans that call for coordinated action to protect open space and recreational opportunities for local and regional use, including the policies of county general plan open space elements throughout the region, policies and plans of local conservation districts, as well as regional conservation plans of entities such as the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG); (2) it serves a regional constituency – the nine-county Bay Area, plus Santa Cruz County; (3) it can be implemented in a timely way because many project elements and all staff are already in place; and (4) it provides opportunities to articulate the need for habitat protection, land conservation, and public access benefits that could go unrecognized if the project is not quickly implemented.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1.3, Meaningful Engagement by Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will incorporate meaningful community engagement around biodiversity and public access, including enlisting approximately 300 existing and new Bay Area land conservation practitioners to help drive the contents and products of the CLN.

Consistent with **Goal 3.1, Conserve Land**, the proposed project supports regional planning and prioritization of key acquisition and stewardship opportunities to advance climate and wildfire resilience and increase and protect biodiversity, and enables modelling of 8 million terrestrial acres for conservation attributes, leading to approximately 2.5 million acres of priority lands identified for conservation.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

Authorizing the recommended grant is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines at California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15262, which exempts feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions from the requirement to prepare an Environmental Impact Report or negative declaration, and 15306, which exempts from CEQA basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not disturb environmental resources. The project consists of planning activities, preparation of mapping and informational tools for prioritization of conservation properties for acquisition and stewardship, and engagement and outreach, all of which will be undertaken for possible future actions that the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or funded. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of this project.