

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 29, 2012

**ELLWOOD MESA COASTAL TRAIL**

Project No.12-002-01

Project Manager: Rachel Couch

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to the Santa Barbara Trails Council to prepare design, engineering, environmental compliance and permitting documents for a segment of the California Coastal Trail that will provide public access to and along the Santa Barbara Channel shoreline.

**LOCATION:** Ellwood Mesa, west of the University of California, Santa Barbara, City of Goleta, Santa Barbara County (Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Figures and Photos

Exhibit 3: Ellwood Devereux Coast Open Space and Habitat Management Plan (2004) and FEIR

Exhibit 4: Project Letters

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400-31410 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to \$100,000 (one hundred thousand dollars) to the Santa Barbara Trails Council (Trails Council) to prepare design, engineering, environmental compliance and permitting documents for a segment of the California Coastal Trail in Santa Barbara County, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the commencement of work and the disbursement of funds, the Trails Council shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a detailed work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project and evidence that Santa Barbara Trails Council shall provide all remaining funds needed to complete the study.

2. To the extent appropriate, the Trails Council shall ensure that the final designs of project improvements are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development' and all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines for disabled access.
3. The Trails Council shall work with the City of Goleta to post California Coastal Trail signs along existing segments of the Coastal Trail within its jurisdiction."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on June 4, 2009.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding public access.
3. The project will serve greater than local needs.
4. Santa Barbara Trails Council is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code."

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$100,000 to the Santa Barbara Trails Council (Trails Council) to prepare design, engineering, environmental compliance and permitting documents for the construction of accessway improvements and a blufftop segment of the California Coastal Trail in southern Santa Barbara County. As part of the 1,200-mile California Coastal Trail (CCT), the Ellwood Mesa segment will provide a trail connection between City of Goleta neighborhoods to the north, UC Santa Barbara and Coal Oil Point Nature Preserve lands to the east, and the scenic rural open lands along the Gaviota Coast to the west. The Ellwood segment will provide coastal access to a wide variety of visitors within a large public open space area and will improve safety and access to the Santa Barbara Channel shoreline.

The Ellwood Mesa Open Space (also referred to here as the "Sperling Preserve") has high visitor activity, offering spectacular scenery and one of the best opportunities along the entire stretch of Santa Barbara coastline to access a long natural beach, and enjoy views of the Channel Islands, marine life and the Los Padres National Forest. Improvements to the Ellwood Mesa segment of the CCT is a high priority for implementation because the current unplanned and unmanaged trail and beach accessways pose significant constraints for trail users due to poor and uneven trail conditions and severe trail erosion along bluff top trail sections and down the coastal bluff face. The high, and sometimes inappropriate, use along with unmanaged stormwater runoff has also resulted in serious environmental damage in the form of bluff failure along mesa's edge, erosion and deep gullying on the blufftop and within the riparian areas. The proposed project will improve access to and along the shoreline from a public trailhead parking lot by improving

the condition of the existing trail and addressing severe erosion problems. The project will make improvements to two coastal accessways connecting the bluff to the beach. The project will also close a number of informal “social” trails currently impacting sensitive habitat areas, and restore them, thereby enhancing visitor experience.

The Ellwood Mesa Coastal Trail project would implement the vision embodied in the *2004 Ellwood-Devereux Coast Open Space and Habitat Management Plan* (“the Ellwood Plan”) and the City of Goleta’s *Public Access and Recreation Element* (PAR Element) that identified a planned trails network, including the CCT through the open space.

The proposed project will improve approximately 2.1 miles of coastal trail (Exhibit 1 Project Location and Site Map). The trail will begin at a public trailhead parking lot at Hollister Avenue, head south to Devereux Creek, and then turn southeast along the bluff where it will connect with the adjacent proposed CCT segment within and north of UCSB’s Coal Oil Point Nature Reserve. A portion of the trail will also loop around the western end of the preserve. Improvements will be made at two existing but badly eroded beach access points connecting the blufftop to the beach. The planning portion of the project will consist of two phases: Phase I will involve public outreach to gather input on initial trail design concepts and development of a project description. Phase II will involve preparation of environmental compliance documents and permitting activities. The project will use the trail design criteria established in the Ellwood Plan as an initial starting point. In the years since the plan was drafted, community sentiment appears to favor more modest trail design standards for mesa area. Initial development of the project description, engineering and public input process will be critical in determining the scope and cost of permitting and constructing the project.

The City of Goleta has jurisdiction over the Sperling Preserve. The City has engaged in habitat restoration and passive recreation stewardship and of the area with the public over the past decade, and seeks to improve the access amenities for a wider segment of the public at the project site. The City and the Trails Council have partnered recently on trail maintenance projects at the project site and at Lake Los Carneros Park, and will work closely to plan and implement this project.

The Santa Barbara Trails Council was formed in 1972 as part of an effort to build community support for trails throughout Santa Barbara County. The Trails Council is a well-established organization responsible for accomplishing its mission of supporting access to new trails, enhancement of existing trails and safe shared use. The organization works closely with local agencies and community groups to plan and implement trail construction and repair projects, and is well qualified to carry out the proposed project.

**Site Description:**

The project is located on lands within the jurisdiction of the City of Goleta within Santa Barbara County. Goleta is largely semi-rural and suburban area that incorporated in 2002 located approximately 10 miles west of Santa Barbara. Goleta and its surrounding area contain important natural resources, including outstanding beaches, the Goleta and Devereux Sloughs, Marine Reserves, coastal bluff, foothill and creek habitats supporting numerous plant communities and wildlife species.

Goleta offers outstanding opportunities for coastal recreation. Surfing, fishing, hiking, boating, birdwatching, wildlife viewing, and beach walking are just some of the activities enjoyed by

locals and visitors. The University of California attracts students, faculty and staff and visitors to the area, along with “clean” high tech industries, and the City of Santa Barbara, providing for a diverse local population, with many amenities to attract tourists.

The Ellwood Mesa area provides one of the largest contiguous coastal open space areas in the South Coast and offers a range of opportunities for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, butterfly watching, surfing, bird watching, dog walking and beach activities. The open space fronts over a mile of coastline and is adjacent to the Coal Oil Point Reserve, part of the UC Natural Reserve System. Though in close proximity to nearby neighborhoods, the mesa area offers a spectacular natural environment located in a tranquil and unspoiled setting. As a result, the Ellwood Mesa area is one of Goleta’s most popular day use areas.

The area is also home to numerous sensitive species and habitats, including native grasslands, vernal pools, monarch butterfly groves, raptor breeding, foraging and nesting. Snowy Plovers nest on adjacent beaches.

**Project History:**

For several decades, the Ellwood Mesa area was the focus of major battles between environmental groups who wanted to preserve the hundreds of acres of critical coastal habitat and developers who wanted to build on the prime bluff top property. In 2001, Santa Barbara County and UC Santa Barbara developed a sweeping proposal for the area that would reduce the amount of residential development, relocate development to inland locations and away from sensitive coastal resources and to establish a 650+ acre open space and natural reserve, provide for habitat improvements, and allow public access consistent with conservation and habitat management needs. In 2002, the newly created City of Goleta joined the process, and the parties collaborated to develop the *Ellwood-Devereux Coast Open Space & Habitat Management Plan*.

In 2005, an agreement with the City of Goleta for development of a portion of the Ellwood Mesa away from the bluff area in exchange for the bluff top property resulted in the creation of an open space area called the Sperling Preserve, known by locals as Ellwood Mesa. In 2005, the Conservancy provided a grant of \$4 million to the City to help acquire the remainder of the open space.

In 2009, in partnership with the City, the Trails Council applied for and obtained a \$6,000 grant to begin restoration of the main coastal access points and trails that had been severely impacted by erosion. The work was completed in 2010 and has provided short-term improvements to reduce the impacts of erosion and safe access to the beach for the thousands of visitors that use Ellwood each year. It has become clear that long term solutions are needed to address issues affecting Ellwood Mesa trails and the identified California Coastal Trail route along the mile-long blufftop, to provide for sustainable use.

The City and the Trails Council approached the Conservancy in 2010 to request funds for planning of a trail improvement project on Ellwood Mesa. The project will connect to two existing Conservancy projects, the Ocean Meadows property, scheduled to be acquired in fall of 2012 and the Coal Oil Point Reserve, where coastal access improvements and habitat restoration are currently underway utilizing Conservancy funds.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	\$100,000.00
<b>Goleta Valley Land Trust</b>	<u>\$50,000.00</u>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	\$150,000.00

The expected source for the Conservancy funds for this authorization is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 authorizes the use of these funds for the purpose of promoting access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state (Section 75060 of the Public Resources Code). Section 75060(b) of the Public Resources Code specifically allocates funding to the Conservancy for expenditure pursuant to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. The proposed project serves to promote access to coastal resources and, as discussed in the section found immediately below, the project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.

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

"The proposed project is consistent with the Santa Barbara County Coastal Land Use Plan (LCP) as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below."

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy will "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 31400.1 restricts the Conservancy to providing grants to local agencies only for accessways that serve greater than local needs. Consistent with this section, the Coastal Trail through Goleta will serve both local residents and visitors from throughout the state.

Section 31400.2 authorizes the Conservancy to provide up to the total cost of the initial development of a public accessway by any public agency, and the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy shall be determined by the total amount of funding available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy. Consistent with this section, the proposed amount of the Conservancy contribution was determined based on the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for public access projects, the matching funds provided by the grantee (see Project Financing), and the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, including project urgency (See Consistency with Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines). The proposed authorization would leverage matching funds totaling 33% of the costs for this.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31400.3, under which the Conservancy is authorized to provide funds “required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division.” These funds will be used for the preliminary engineering/design, environmental analysis, and permitting of the proposed trail segment portion.

Finally, the proposed project is consistent with section 31408, which states that a) the Conservancy “shall, in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation, the California Coastal Commission, and the Department of Transportation, coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail”, and b) that “to the extent feasible, and consistent with their individual mandates, each agency, board, department, or commission of the state with property interests or regulatory authority in coastal areas shall cooperate with the Conservancy with respect to planning and making lands available for completion of the trail, including constructing trail links, placing signs, and managing the trail.” The Conservancy will work closely with these agencies to coordinate the development of the trail in the Goleta area.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective B** of the Conservancy’s Strategic Plan, as part of the proposed project, the Trails Council will install Coastal Trail signs along approximately three miles of existing Coastal Trail segments within the City of Goleta.

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective C**, the proposed project would complete plans for 2-mile link in the City of Goleta portion of the California Coastal Trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy’s statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project is supported by U.S. Congresswoman Lois Capps, State Assemblymember Pedro Nava, County Supervisor Doreen Farr, and several local non-profit organizations including the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition, and Santa Barbara Trails Council. (Exhibit 3: Project Letters).
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Goleta.

5. **Need:** The Trails Council has obtained a grant for a portion of the project, but due to the poor economy, the city is only able to contribute in-kind assistance to the project at this time. Without additional funding, the Trails Council and the City of Goleta will not be able to complete this phase of the project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Visitors come to the south coast of Santa Barbara County from other regions to enjoy the mild climate, accessible beaches, and many recreational amenities this area has to offer. The Ellwood Mesa segment will provide visitors with improved access to the coast and will connect to the city of Goleta to the north, and UCSB and more urban areas to the east and will become the gateway to eventual trail segments along the scenic rural open lands of the Gaviota Coast to the west.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The Ellwood Mesa segment's vulnerability to sea level rise will be evaluated in the environmental analysis for the years 2050 and 2100. The segment will be designed to have a life of at least 20 years. The section of trail nearest the bluff face could be moved inland if the bluff were to fail as a result of sea level rise impacts.

**Additional Criteria**

8. **Urgency:** The project is needed to address severe and worsening erosion problems that are negatively impacting the trail and trail user experience.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
10. **Readiness:** The Trails Council and the City of Goleta have demonstrated their ability to work together in the past and are ready to move forward with the project.
11. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the "Project History" section above.
12. **Cooperation:** The project will involve a public outreach component to help guide design of the trail.

**CONSISTENCY WITH THE CONSERVANCY'S STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSWAY LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT:**

As a condition of approval, the project will be designed to be consistent with the Coastal Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development. In particular:

**Standard No. 1. Protect the Public and Coastal Resources:** The proposed project will be designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms, will be subordinate to the setting's character, will prevent unwarranted hazards to the land and public safety, and will protect environmentally sensitive habitats.

**Standard No. 2. Correct Hazards:** The proposed project will be designed to correct unsafe conditions such as those that exist in the erosion gullies along the coastal bluff edge.

**Standard No. 5. Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The proposed project will be designed to ensure that adverse effects on natural resources are avoided. Specifically, most of the trail uses existing trail bed.

**Standard No. 8. Trails:** The accessway would links inland recreational facilities (Sperling Preserve Open Space parking lot, part of the local park system) to the shoreline and connect to an

existing segment of the California Coastal Trail on the adjacent UC Coal Oil Point Reserve, which includes interconnected coastal bluff open space and beach trails that in turn connect to other Coastal Trail segments on land owned by UC Santa Barbara.

**Standard No. 9. Scenic Overlooks:** The entire length of the trail will be designed to take advantage of the area's scenic views.

**Standard No. 12. Support Facilities:** Designs for the project will consider the placement of support facilities such as overlooks, benches and trash receptacles, as appropriate.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project will fall within the jurisdictions of both the City of Goleta and County of Santa Barbara. The City General Plan (adopted in 2007) also serves as its Draft Coastal Plan. However, the General Plan has not yet been certified by the Coastal Commission as the Local Coastal Program. The City uses the County's zoning ordinance for review of coastal projects. For the purposes of this project, policy consistency is analyzed using both the County's Coastal Land Use Plan and the City's adopted General Plan.

The certified Santa Barbara County Coastal Land Use Plan (LCP), adopted in 1982, contains several general policies that support the proposed project. Goal 1.2(b) seeks to "assure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of coastal zone resources taking into account the social and economic needs of the people and the state" and Goal 1.2(c) calls for local agencies to "maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resources conservation principles." The Ellwood Mesa Coastal Trail will conserve coastal resources while meeting a community need for safe, non-motorized access between a popular bluff park, beach and nearby coastal attractions. Policy 3.7-6 states that recreational uses on oceanfront lands, both public and private, that do not require extensive alteration to the natural environment...shall have priority over uses requiring substantial alteration." Policy 7-12 states that "new opportunities for beach access and coastal recreation shall be provided in the Goleta planning area." Implementing Action 7-12(c) states that "provision of a public moderate use recreation area including parking, restrooms, bluff top hiking and biking trails, picnic tables, and appropriate access to the sandy beach shall be required as a condition of any future development on the Santa Barbara Shores property. In the interim, the County shall obtain a vertical easement across the eastern portion of the property to provide for public beach access." The proposed trail will be located along an existing trail alignment and will not require extensive alteration to the landscape and will provide improved accessibility and connectivity to other areas by improving the condition and tread of the trail and by reducing erosion. Furthermore, the trail route will be designed to improve a creek crossing, does not impact any wetlands, and will avoid any sensitive species.

The City's General Plan also contains several policies that support the proposed project. Policy OS 2.3 states that, "existing public vertical coastal access facilities shall be protected and preserved and shall be expanded or enhanced where feasible". The Ellwood Mesa segment will include the design of improvements to the two existing bluff to beach access points providing expanded access to this popular coastal destination. The objective of Policy OS 4 is to "designate, preserve, and expand a public trail system that will provide recreation opportunities



for multiple types of users in diverse and attractive environmental settings and that will connect various parks and neighborhoods with the regional trail network...” The project will construct accessway improvements that will provide additional recreation and access opportunities along the coastline to a wider range of users than the current trail system provides, and provide a connection from a public parking lot and surrounding neighborhoods, and another coastal trail segment with the beach. Public Access Policy OS 5.3 states that “the Ellwood-Devereux Open Space Area shall be managed to maintain the site’s historical public access and recreation uses while managing accessways to protect natural resources such as the monarch butterfly groves, vernal pools, native grasslands, beaches, coastal bluffs, and other environmentally sensitive habitat areas.” The proposed project will assist the grantee with planning for the future maintenance and management of public access on the site while protecting existing sensitive habitat areas, allowing for long term sustainable use. Policy 5.3 further states that “the California Coastal Trail segment within the Ellwood-Devereux Open Space Area, the other major east-west trail, is planned to have a bluff-top alignment” and Policy 4.3b states that the following criteria shall apply to the Coastal Trail: “the trail shall be connected at appropriate intervals to existing and proposed local trail systems and to vertical access facilities” and “the trail shall be planned primarily as a pedestrian trail, although certain segments, particularly within the City owned Ellwood-Devereux Open Space Area, may be planned to accommodate the needs of bicyclists and/or equestrians.” The project will design trail and accessway improvements along the bluff and between bluff and beach to improve the visitor experience, using the established criteria.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or agreed to fund. As required by Section 15262, planning for this segment of the California Coastal Trail will include consideration of environmental factors.

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