

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
June 29, 2006

**MILPITAS-BERRYESSA RIDGE TRAIL PLANNING**

File No. 06-043  
Project Manager: Amy Hutzal

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$50,000 to the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority to plan a segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail in the Milpitas-Berryessa area connecting Santa Clara County Open Space Authority lands to City of San Jose parklands.

**LOCATION:** Northeast of the City of San José, in unincorporated Santa Clara County.

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) to the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority to plan the development of a segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail in the Milpitas-Berryessa area of Santa Clara County, subject to the condition that no Conservancy funds shall be disbursed until the Executive Officer of the Conservancy has approved in writing a final work plan, including a budget and schedule, and any contractors proposed to be used.”

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 purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the California Public Code (Sections 31160-31164) regarding the Conservancy’s mandate to address the resource and recreation goals of the San Francisco Bay area.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$50,000 to the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority (“SCCOSA”) to plan and design a new 6-mile segment of the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail (“Ridge Trail”) in the Milpitas-Berryessa area. Using this grant, the SCCOSA will complete planning and environmental review of: 1) completion of the Ridge Trail through the Kirk, Furtado, and Vilas properties, which SCCOSA owns in fee title, as well as the Frankel property, on which SCCOSA recently acquired a conservation and trail easement, and 2) a staging area on Sierra Road, which would allow access to the trail from the uphill portion of the properties.

The proposed segment of trail will cover approximately half of the distance of a strategic gap in the Ridge Trail between Alum Rock Park and Joseph D. Grant Regional Park to the south (see Exhibit 1). The trail will be located on lands owned by the SCCOSA in fee or as trail easements and will connect to an existing segment of Ridge Trail on SCCOSA lands, the Boccardo Trail. The Boccardo Trail in turn connects to the State’s oldest existing City Park, Alum Rock Park. When completed, the trail on SCCOSA lands will allow hikers to walk from a beautiful low elevation riparian corridor within Alum Rock Park, to spectacular vistas above 2,500-feet in elevation.

This is a regionally significant trail segment, providing new trail experiences to South Bay communities. The project site is located east of downtown San José and is convenient from a large number of population centers and recreation facilities. There is a direct linkage to the project site from the City of San José’s Alum Rock Park, and easy linkage from the Penitencia Creek Park chain, the Berryessa Community Center, and multiple city parks and neighborhoods. The new 6-mile trail segment will be designed to current county standards for multiple use regional trails.

An additional element of the planning project will be to identify the location for a much needed staging area and trailhead on Sierra Road, to allow for access to the upper reaches of this incredible landscape on day hikes.

The planning will include CEQA analysis and documentation for review and possible adoption by the SCCOSA Board of Directors. The planning will address the preferred location of a Sierra Road staging area, including a review of impacts to public safety, traffic, water quality, aesthetics and visibility. This project also includes analysis of trail location, natural and cultural resources, geologic and geotechnical issues, impacts to neighbors, and estimating construction costs. There is no permitting currently anticipated for this project. It is anticipated that the analysis will be completed by early 2007 and trail construction could occur in the Spring or Summer of 2007.

**Site Description:** The lands subject to this planning project, the Kirk, Furtado, Vilas, and Frankel properties, lie between Ed Levin County Park to the north and Joseph D. Grant County

Park to the south. The heavily-used Alum Rock Park lies directly west and below the properties. Alum Rock Park was a spectacular destination in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with mineral baths, an indoor swimming pool, tea garden, dance pavilion and the Alum Rock Steam Railroad which ran from 1890 to 1911 before being destroyed by heavy floods. Typical of the Diablo range, the subject properties contain a mix of grassland and oak woodland, and are hot and dry in late spring and summer, and cool and moist in late fall and winter. The trail's location along the westernmost ridgeline of the Diablo Range will provide spectacular views of the bay, Santa Clara Valley, and the coast interior range.

**Project History:** The Conservancy is a major partner in helping to implement the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Since 2001, the Conservancy has approved approximately \$3.5 million dollars in grants for planning and project implementation, helping complete more than 60 miles of new trail. This project would continue to build connections between existing trail segments and help complete the more than 500-mile trail by connecting the Diablo Range to the Santa Cruz Mountain range via the Santa Clara Valley.

In January of 2000, the Conservancy authorized \$500,000 in funds to SCCOSA to complete the acquisition of the Kirk Property. The Conservancy, in October of 2002, authorized \$100,000 to SCCOSA to acquire the nearby Aoki Property. The Furtado and Vilas properties were acquired by SCCOSA in 2001 and 2003, respectively, and the Frankel easement was acquired by SCCOSA in 2005. The first Ridge Trail segment on these SCCOSA lands was dedicated in May of 2002.

In November of 2005, the SCCOSA applied for this planning grant in order to develop a trail linking the Kirk, Furtado, Vilas, and Frankel properties. This trail will serve as a major step in closing the Ridge Trail gap between Alum Rock Park and Joseph D. Grant County Park to the South. The Ridge Trail Council and Conservancy staff ranked the project as a high priority due to the regional significance of the trail gap, the location of the proposed trail and staging area near a major population center, and the importance of the partnership with the SCCOSA to complete the Ridge Trail in Santa Clara County. Conservancy funds would allow the SCCOSA to plan for and to conduct the environmental review of the trail and staging area on their properties.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$50,000
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority	<u>50,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

The requested Conservancy funds are expected to come from the FY 04/05 California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40) appropriation for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. This funding source may be used for the deployment and development of land and water resources in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 21 of the Public Resources Code. (Public Resources Code Section 5096.650(b)). The proposed project provides planning for the development of land-based public access. In addition, as discussed in the section found immediately below, the project is consistent with the objectives and requirements for a project

under the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Chapter 4.5 of Division 21. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds. (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651). SCCOSA has committed to providing matching funds in the amount of about one half of the total cost of the project.

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

This proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program enabling legislation codified at Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31160 to 31164). That chapter directs the Conservancy to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area in a "coordinated, comprehensive, and effective way."

Pursuant to Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that help to achieve various goals, including the goal of increasing public access "to and around the bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open space, consistent with the rights of private property owners, and without having a significant adverse impact on agricultural operations and environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife, including wetlands and other wildlife habitats through completion and operation of regional bay, coast, and ridge trail systems, and local trails connecting to population centers and public facilities, which are part of a regional trail system and regionally adopted master plans and general plans, and through the provision and preservation of related facilities, such as interpretive centers, picnic areas, staging areas, and campgrounds." The proposed project plans for completion of the Ridge Trail through SCCOSA's properties in eastern Santa Clara County.

Section 31163(a) directs the Conservancy to cooperate with nonprofit land trusts and other organizations in identifying and adopting long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay area. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's "Regional Needs Briefing Book."

The proposed project satisfies the criteria for determining project priorities under Section 31163(c) in the following respects: 1) the Ridge Trail is a multijurisdictional resource; 2) the Ridge Trail serves a regional constituency; 3) the Milpitas-Berryessa planning project can be implemented in a timely way; 4) the planning of the Ridge Trail through the lands managed by the SCCOSA provides an opportunity for benefits that could be lost as the SCCOSA looks to plan the recreational uses of the properties within their control; and 5) the project includes significant matching contributions from the SCCOSA.

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

Consistent with **Goal #11, Objective B** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, which seeks to develop an additional 60 miles of the Ridge Trail, this project will complete planning work to open approximately 6 miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. Planning work will be completed in early 2007, followed by trail construction by SCCOSA in the Spring or Summer of 2007.

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

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, 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:** There is a great deal of local support for the project from trail users and members of the local community. Strong support for trail development within the lands controlled by SCCOSA comes from hikers, equestrians, and mountain cyclists, including the Responsible Organized Mountain Pedalers (ROMP), a local cycling club with over 400 members. Members have expressed great enthusiasm multi-use trails providing access to open space and ridgelines, as well as enthusiasm for completing more segments of the Ridge Trail. The project is also supported by State Senator Elaine Alquist and Assemblyperson Simon Salinas. See Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project is in Santa Clara County, within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is needed to enable the SCCOSA to implement this planning project immediately, as part of their planning for the Milpitas-Berryessa study area.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ridge Trail is truly a regional attraction. The 500-mile trail network offers spectacular views of the Bay Area and links many parklands and open space preserves. In addition, the Ridge Trail will be tied to the San Francisco Bay Trail and the California Coastal Trail systems, creating an extensive trail network. Completion of the Ridge Trail is one of the goals identified in the Bay Area Open Space Council's "Regional Needs Briefing Book."

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
8. **Readiness:** The SCCOSA would like to start the planning work this summer. If approved, it is anticipated that work will begin immediately.
9. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above.
11. **Cooperation:** The San Francisco Bay Area Program of the State Coastal Conservancy has been working cooperatively with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to administer a competitive grant program to identify projects that help implement the Ridge Trail. The best proposals from that grant program are recommended for funding by the Conservancy.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

This project is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262 because it involves only feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions and will not have a legally binding effect on later activities. As also required, the project will involve full consideration of environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.