

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

July 16, 2007

**BALLONA CREEK TRAIL
MILTON STREET PARK**

File No. 07-058-01

Project Manager: Mary Small

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for project planning and design of a proposed 1.2-acre park at the recently acquired Milton St parcel along the Ballona Creek in the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County.

LOCATION: Los Angeles, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location](#)

Exhibit 2: [Site Aerial](#)

Exhibit 3: [Letters of Support](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA) for project planning and design of a proposed 1.2-acre park along the Ballona Creek Trail in the City of Los Angeles. This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, MRCA shall submit for review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work plan, budget and schedule and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed to carry out these tasks.”

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 Public Resources Code Sections 31400 *et seq.* regarding coastal public accessways;

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Guidelines and Criteria adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. The proposed project serves greater than local need.”
-

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize the disbursement of an amount not to exceed \$100,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) for project planning and design of a proposed 1.2-acre park at the Milton Street parcel along the Ballona Creek Trail in the City of Los Angeles. The Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority acquired this property last month because it was identified as an important opportunity to create a park between a schoolyard and the Ballona Creek Trail.

The Class I Ballona Creek Trail stretches for seven miles along Ballona Creek, serving as an important recreational resource and linking densely populated urban centers with state and county beaches and the Coastal Trail. However, for most of its distance, the Ballona Creek Trail is paved pathway along a concrete flood control channel. There are very few parks or landscaped areas along the trail. This Milton Street site offers an opportunity to create a park adjacent to the trail which will serve as a gateway for trail users and a greenspace to enhance trail user’s experience. The design project will also investigate potentially using the site for a demonstration project that combines alternative stormwater treatment and public park space. Because the site is adjacent to a school, there is also an opportunity to integrate environmental education components into the design.

The MRCA is a local government entity established in 1985 pursuant to the Joint Powers Act. The MRCA is a partnership between the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, which is a state agency, and the Conejo Recreation and Park District and the Rancho Simi Recreation and park District both of which are local park agencies established by the vote of the people in those communities. The MRCA is dedicated to the preservation and management of local open space and parkland, watershed lands, trails and wildlife habitat. The MRCA manages and provides ranger services for almost 50,000 acres of public lands and parks. MRCA provides education and interpretive programs for the public along the Ballona Creek Trail. The Baldwin Hills Conservancy, the County and other partners have worked with MRCA to successfullt plan and develop numerous parks along the Ballona Creek Trail, including the Centinela Gateway entrance adjacent to the subject property.

Site Description:

Between its headwaters in the Santa Monica Mountains and its mouth in Santa Monica Bay, Ballona Creek passes through a heavily urbanized area that is home to nearly three million people. Most of the above-ground section of the creek is a concrete flood protection and storm water drainage channel, completed by the Army Corps of Engineers after the floods of 1938. Consistent with other flood protection channels under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Flood Control District and the Army Corps of Engineers, a bike path was constructed in 1977 to provide recreation as a secondary purpose.

The Ballona Creek Trail stretches for seven miles parallel to the waterway, serving as an important recreational resource and linking densely populated urban centers with state and county beaches and the Coastal Trail. The Ballona Creek Trail is the only non-street inland walking and bicycle trail that exists in this part of Los Angeles County. The trail links local parks, schools and libraries and is becoming an important commuting path to the creative and new media/technology districts in Culver City.

The project area is a 1.2-acre rectangular parcel adjacent to the Ballona Creek Trail. To the east of the site is the Centinella Park, a rest area and access point to the bike/pedestrian path from Centinella Blvd. Directly north of the proposed park is a small residential street, Milton St., and the ball fields of Marina Del Rey Middle School. . The site is directly across the creek from the confluence of the Ballona and Centinela Creek and about .08 miles upstream from the Ballona Wetlands, a current Coastal Conservancy enhancement project.

Project History:

In 2000, the Conservancy helped fund a regional plan for creation of a “Park to Playa” river parkway from the Baldwin Hills to Marina Del Rey. The plan envisioned creation of a parkway along Ballona Creek to link expanded parks at the Baldwin Hills to the beaches and the Coastal Trail. In 2001, the Conservancy helped fund the Ballona Creek and Trail Focused Special Study which identified potential improvements to the creek and trail. Consistent with that study, the Conservancy has also provided funding for the construction of a pedestrian bridge in Culver City which increased access to the Ballona Creek Trail. That project has been completed. This project will help to implement the vision of the “Park to Playa” and the Focused Study, developing a multi-benefit, gateway park that will increase access to the trail and enhance the experience of trail users.

The Milton Street site was recently purchase by the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority with \$850,000 in County Proposition A funds and \$850,000 in Baldwin Hills Conservancy Prop 40 funds. If approved, MRCA would begin the site planning work this summer.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Baldwin Hills Conservancy	<u>25,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$125,000

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to derive from the Conservancy’s FY2002/03 appropriation from Proposition 40 (the “Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2002”). Proposition 40 authorizes the use of these funds for the purpose of coastal development projects undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Division 21 of the Public Resources Code). Implementation of this project will enhance a major public accessway linking to the Coastal Trail. The project is consistent with the Conservancy’s enabling legislation as described below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Division 21, Chapter 9, of the Public Resources Code, directs the Coastal Conservancy to take a principle role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state’s coastline (Section 31400) and to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail (Section 31408). In connection with these mandates, Chapter 9 provides specific authorization for the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations for the development of public accessways “to and along the coast” (Section 31400.1) and for projects “to establish and expand those inland trail systems that may be linked to the California Coastal Trail” (Section 31409). Although the proposed project is situated outside of the Coastal Zone, it serves to develop a public accessway to and along the coast and to provide access along an inland regional bikeway that provides access to the Coastal Trail, consistent with and as authorized by Sections 31400.1 and 31409. The project is also consistent with the additional requirement of Public Resources Code Section 31400.1 that permits a grant to a public agency only if the resulting public accessway will serve more than local public needs. The Milton Street Project will serve more than just the local residents because it will enhance the Ballona Creek Trail, which links the City of Culver City and the City and County of Los Angeles to Marian Del Rey, the Coastal Trail, and Pacific Ocean beaches. This trail is the only non-street inland walking and bicycle trail that exists in this part of Los Angeles County, which has a population of approximately three million. The Ballona Creek Trail serve residents from the many surrounding communities including Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, Crenshaw District, Leimert Park, Blair Hills, Hyde Park, Westchester, Palms, Mar Vista, Del Rey, and Marina Del Rey.

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

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective E**, the proposed project will complete a plan to improve a park along a regional parkway that connects inland populations to the coast.

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:** The project is supported by the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, Supervisor Burke, Assemblymember Bass, and US Representative Harmon. Letters of support are attached as Exhibit 3.

4. **Location:** The project site is located outside of the Coastal Zone in Los Angeles County, but the project will improve a public accessway to the coast and provide an inland link to the Coastal trail, as authorized by the Conservancy's enabling legislation.
5. **Need:** Coastal Conservancy funding is needed to fund this project. Although partners have helped to fund the acquisition and are expected to fund the development of the park, there is limited funding available for the planning work that needs to be completed before the park can be constructed.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Ballona Creek Trail is a link between urban areas that are home to nearly three million people and the coast, including Marina Del Rey, the Coastal Trail, and Pacific Ocean beaches. This trail is the only off-street inland walking and bicycle trail that exists in this part of Los Angeles County. This project will enhance the trail and which is used by visitors as well as residents from the many surrounding communities including: Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, Crenshaw District, Leimert Park, Blair Hills, Hyde Park, Westchester, Palms, Mar Vista, Del Rey, and Marina Del Rey.

Additional Criteria

7. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above. Acquisition of the Milton Street parcel was funded jointly by the Baldwin Hills Recreation Conservation Authority and the Baldwin Hills Conservancy.
8. **Readiness:** The Milton Street site was purchased last month. If approved, MRCA would begin the site planning work this summer.
9. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy has a long history of working on projects in the Ballona Creek watershed including the enhancement of the Ballona Wetlands and work to support the goals of the Baldwin Hills Conservancy. In addition, the Conservancy has previously supported work to enhance the Ballona Creek Trail, as discussed under "Project History" above.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN/
STATE WATER QUALITY CONTROL PLAN:**

This project is consistent with the Ballona Creek Watershed Management Plan which calls for a comprehensive system of bike and pedestrian paths connected to and between neighborhoods. The plan also identifies the need to develop parks that are connected to Ballona Creek and the Creek Trail.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

This project involves only feasibility and planning studies and is thus exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Section 15262. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption (NOE) for this project upon approval.