

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
November 20, 2025

ARENA COVE COASTAL TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

Project No. 22-087-02
Project Manager: Louisa Morris

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$565,000 to the Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. to undertake the Arena Cove Coastal Trail Construction Project, consisting of construction of a 0.3-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail and related trail amenities at Arena Cove in Point Arena, Mendocino County.

LOCATION: Arena Cove, Point Arena, Mendocino County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Photos](#)
Exhibit 3: [Support Letters](#)
Exhibit 4: [CEQA Notice of Exemption](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed five hundred sixty-five thousand dollars (\$565,000) to the Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. (the “grantee”) to undertake the Arena Cove Coastal Trail Construction Project, consisting of construction of a 0.3-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail and related trail amenities, including two stairways, benches, a viewing platform, fencing, and signage with management, directional, and interpretive information, at Arena Cove in Point Arena, Mendocino County (the “project”).

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. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding and, if required by the funding source, the source of that funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements (including any easements) sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.
6. Evidence that the grantee has entered into and recorded agreements pursuant to Public Resources Code 31116(d) sufficient to protect the public interest in the improvements.

In addition, to the extent appropriate, the grantee 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 provision of public accessways.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the State Coastal Conservancy (the "Conservancy") authorize a grant of an amount not to exceed \$565,000 to the Mendocino Land Trust, Inc. ("MLT") to undertake the Arena Cove Coastal Trail Construction Project, consisting of construction a 0.3-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail ("CCT") and related trail amenities, including two stairways, benches, a viewing platform, fencing, and signage with management, directional, and interpretive information, at Arena Cove, in Point Arena, Mendocino County (the "project"). See Exhibit 1 for project location. The 0.3-mile segment of the CCT that will be constructed as part of this project is referred to as the Arena Cove Coastal Trail. The project includes construction of related public access trail amenities including two stairways, benches, a viewing platform, fencing, and signage with trail management, directional, and interpretive information. The Arena Cove Coastal Trail will connect Arena Cove to the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM")-managed Point Arena-Stornetta Unit of the California Coastal National Monument.

The Arena Cove Coastal Trail will begin at Arena Cove, in the City of Point Arena ("City"), which includes a working pier for commercial/recreational fishing and access to a variety of water sports, including surfing and kayaking. Arena Cove is a registered historic district, which features a city park, beach, creek, restaurants, lodging, and parking. The Arena Cove Coastal Trail will start at Port Road and will travel north across private property (Coast Guard Inn)

within a trail easement donated by the owner of the Coast Guard Inn. The trail will follow hillside contours to a knoll on BLM land at Stornetta Bluffs at approximately 200 feet elevation. These bluffs offer an incredible view of Arena Cove and the Pacific Ocean. Ultimately, the trail will be located on several properties: Port Road, which is owned by the City; the Coast Guard Inn private property; and the BLM's Stornetta Ranch property.

Currently, the CCT in this area is limited to a network of trails on BLM lands along the blufftop, extending from the Point Arena Lighthouse south to Point Arena City Hall and Highway One. These trails provide access along and to the edge of the bluff overlooking the Cove, but do not currently connect to the Cove. The Arena Cove Coastal Trail will enable visitors to hike down from this blufftop to Arena Cove, thereby connecting the Cove to the Point Arena Lighthouse, a total distance of 3.5 miles. The Point Arena Lighthouse hosts a museum dedicated to Point Arena and its maritime history, which hikers will now be able to access via the Cove. Trail amenities will include two stairways, benches, a viewing platform, fencing, and signage with trail management, directional, and interpretive information. See Exhibit 2 for project photos.

The project will also improve access and amenities in and around the Cove and provide a useful linkage from trails on bluffs to the north down to the Cove. The acquisition of the Stornetta Coastal Ranch, and subsequent designation of that property as part of the California Coastal National Monument, has led to increased visitation to the City. Due to the increased visitation, the City wants to improve public access amenities within the City limits to better serve local residents and visitors to the coast, and this project is a critical piece of improving and augmenting trail infrastructure in and around Point Arena.

The Conservancy has a long history of supporting public access near Point Arena. Immediately north of the City, the Conservancy helped acquire 123 acres and miles of coastline that was transferred to BLM in 2012. This expanded the existing 1,711-acre Stornetta Coastal Ranch Acquisition, which the Conservancy initially supported in 2003. In 2014, the Conservancy funded acquisition of a 1.8-acre parcel in Arena Cove. These acquisitions have provided for the development of a section of CCT connecting the City to the Point Arena Lighthouse. To the south, the Conservancy has also funded acquisition and trail planning and construction on the Pelican Bluffs property with the eventual goal of connecting the City to Moat Creek, a public access point. The Conservancy also funded planning for this 0.3-mile segment of the CCT in 2022, as well as the Arena Cove Harbor Access and Resilience Planning Project in 2023.

Site Description: Point Arena is located in Mendocino County, approximately ten miles north of Gualala. The City is located east and north of Arena Cove. Point Arena Creek flows from Point Arena and enters the Pacific Ocean at the south end of Arena Cove.

Arena Cove features an historic district of various historic Coast Guard facilities, including the Coast Guard Inn and the Coast Guard Boat House. The Cove also features Point Arena's 330-foot long public fishing pier, a hub for sport and commercial fishing activities, kayaking, surfing, and a boat launch. Sea urchin, crab, and salmon are popular commercial fishing industries, and boats are launched by hoist off the Point Arena Pier, which was reconstructed in 1983 after a storm destroyed it.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: MLT has over 25 years of experience successfully administering state, federal, and private grant funds to complete conservation and public access projects along the Mendocino coast. MLT has managed funding from the Conservancy, Caltrans, the California Natural Resources Agency, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and private foundations. MLT has completed over a dozen coastal trail projects, including planning, permitting, construction, and long-term stewardship. This includes planning and constructing segments of the CCT and building public access amenities (including two stairways, boardwalks, interpretive signage, and parking) in coordination with funders, local agencies, private landowners, and contractors.

Once this trail segment is completed and open to the public, MLT will complete monthly trail maintenance activities. Arena Coastal Stewards (ACS), a non-profit dedicated to stewardship of Arena Cove, will also assist with trail maintenance and notify MLT of any issues that need to be addressed.

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 project is a good investment of state resources for several reasons. First, the CCT connection is cost effective for a steep and challenging site. Second, the owner of the property where a large portion of this coastal trail segment is located has donated a public trail easement.

The project leverages non-state resources in the form of a public trail easement donated by the property owner and volunteer contributions by several partners including the City, ACS, MLT, BLM, and others.

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.

During the project planning process, MLT and project partners made a meaningful effort to engage the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians. Project details were shared with the Tribe early in the development phase to ensure transparency and invite input. The Tribe was also contacted as part of the cultural resource survey to ensure that any areas of cultural significance would be appropriately identified and respected.

This trail project includes signage designed by a local artist and member of the Manchester Band of Pomo Indians, incorporating cultural perspectives and knowledge into interpretation of the site. This work is being coordinated in partnership with ACS, a local community group.

These efforts reflect MLT's commitment to building respectful relationships with local tribes through consultation, creative collaboration, and ongoing engagement.

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

Arena Cove is susceptible to and already affected by sea level rise. Waves consistently flood the Cove's parking area during large storms. By building this new coastal trail segment a distance from the waterfront and at a higher elevation than the Cove, the new trail should be safe and secure for years to come.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

Point Arena is a small city (population 427) and disadvantaged community located in a remote part of the Mendocino Coast. Arena Cove and its working harbor, in combination with the Point Arena lighthouse and miles of coastal trail along an undeveloped bluff managed by BLM, provide residents and visitors with a unique combination of open space and coastal dependent uses that have a unique combination of harbor, agricultural, and open space attributes.

Because the site is within a day's drive of the San Francisco Bay Area and Sonoma County, it provides a low-key, affordable, and scenic coastal experience. The geography of the area, sited on a high coastal bluff, ensures resilience, despite continued sea level rise.

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

During the planning and permitting process for this CCT project, partners engaged with over one hundred community members. In conjunction with planning this trail segment, there were several community meetings to discuss the project and Arena Cove more generally. The first meeting was hosted by the City and held at the Chowder House in the Cove. Several topics were discussed, including the connecting trail between Arena Cove and the BLM's Stornetta property, and general support was expressed for this connecting trail. A second community meeting was facilitated by ACS, with the purpose of discussing priorities for the harbor. The Arena Cove connecting trail was one of the top priorities identified at this second community meeting. MLT, ACS, the City, and other community members and groups are in strong support of this effort to connect the Coastal Trail from the Lighthouse to Arena Cove. The City, the McCullough Family (owners of the Coast Guard Inn and trail easement donors), and BLM have all indicated their support for construction of this CCT segment. In addition, letters of support from Congressman Jared Huffman, State Senator Mike McGuire, State Assemblymember Chris Rogers, County Supervisor Ted Williams, the City, and Redwood Coast Land Conservancy, indicate their support for this project (Exhibit 3).

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$565,000
Project Total	\$565,000

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to come from an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections

80000-80173). Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 allows funds for the “protection of beaches, bays, wetlands, and coastal watershed resources” in accordance with Division 21 (PRC Section 80120(c)) and specifically for projects to complete the California Coastal Trail (PRC Section 80120(c)). The definition of “protection” includes actions to improve access to public open-space areas and to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural resources (PRC Section 80002(l)).

The project is consistent with Chapter 9 of Proposition 68 as it consists of improving access to and continuing use of the coast and adding 0.3-miles of trail that will become part of the CCT, a trail of statewide significance, and related trail amenities in Arena Cove, Point Arena, Mendocino County. The project is consistent with the funding guidelines for expenditure of Proposition 68 adopted by the Conservancy on December 6, 2018 as described in various sections of the staff recommendation.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 9 of Division 21 (Sections 31400-31410) of the Public Resources Code.

It is the intent of the Legislature for the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public coastal accessways (Section 31400). To carry out this mandate, the Conservancy is authorized to provide grants to nonprofit organizations to develop, operate, or manage lands for public access to and along the coast; and to provide up to the total cost of initial development of public accessways by any nonprofit organization, as provided in Section 31400.1 (Sections 31400.1 and 31400.2). Pursuant to Section 31400.3, the Conservancy may provide such assistance as is 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.

Consistent with Section 31400.1, the proposed project provides funds to MLT, a nonprofit, to construct a trail with associated signage and amenities, all of which will facilitate improved public access to and along the coast at Point Arena.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, and the Conservancy’s project selection criteria (see Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria & Guidelines).

Consistent with Section 31400.3, the Conservancy’s proposed contribution will assist MLT in constructing a public coastal accessway.

CONSISTENCY WITH [CONSERVANCY’S 2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the proposed project will benefit excluded communities by providing a critical (and currently missing) CCT connection between Arena Cove and the BLM-Stornetta public lands.

Consistent with **Goal 2.3, Expand Accessibility**, the proposed project will expand accessibility between two public land areas that are currently unconnected.

Consistent with **Goal 2.4, Build Trails**, the proposed project will construct a 0.3-mile trail segment of the CCT that will provide a crucial link to an additional three miles of Coastal Trail extending north to the Point Arena Lighthouse.

Consistent with **Goal 2.5, Recreation Facilities & Amenities**, the proposed project will include interpretive materials and other trail amenities such as stairways, benches, a viewing platform, fencing, and signage.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed project is categorically exempt under 14 California Code Regulations (CCR) Section 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures). Section 15303(e) exempts construction of “accessory (appurtenant) structures.” This project consists of a short segment of a trail and other amenities that connect to other larger trails and amenities and is therefore construction of a small structure that is appurtenant to other structures. The City, the lead agency, filed a Notice of Exemption on July 9, 2025 (Exhibit 4).

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