

The State Coastal Conservancy supports two important Del Norte projects

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The Conservancy awarded a grant of up to \$1,500,000 to the Smith River Alliance to implement the Point Saint George Coastal Trail Implementation Project, consisting of cultural resources protection and construction of 1.25 miles of the California Coastal Trail, new restrooms, interpretive signage, and other improvements to the main trailhead parking area at Point Saint George in Del Norte County.

The project will extend the California Coastal Trail, protect sensitive resources, improve public safety, and provide amenities at a natural area that is an important open space destination for tourists and the local community. The project is essential to protect the resources of the site and to improve public access to the 339-acre Point Saint George property that was purchased in part with Conservancy funds in 2002.

“The project will provide multiple benefits,” said Peter Jarausch, Conservancy Project Manager. “It will fill a gap in the coastal trail, providing a continuous reach of coastal trail from Pebble Beach Drive, two miles to the south, to the mouth of the Smith River, approximately 11 miles to the north.”

“This project is located in Tolowa Dee-ni’ Ancestral Lands known as Taa-ghii~-‘a~. We look forward to continuing the collaborative work with our partners, while providing Indigenous input to protect cultural

landscapes, enhance interpretative opportunities and provide responsible public access opportunities,” said Cynthia Ford, Tribal Heritage Preservation Officer, Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation.

Approximately 0.4 miles of the new trail will be accessible to people who use wheelchairs or have reduced mobility. The project will reduce impacts from informal trails on sensitive resources by closing those trails and designating one formal trail in their place, and will protect sensitive cultural resources by capping sites that are currently being exposed through erosion and inappropriate use. The project will include significant improvements to the parking area.

“Del Norte visitors who arrive by plane, fly over this area. Most are awestruck by the outstanding beauty of this part of the California coast and Point St. George in particular”, said Cindy Vosburg, Executive Director, Crescent City-Del Norte Chamber of Commerce. “The new trail will provide important coastal access to community members and visitors by enhancing public access to the coast very close to town. The new Point St. George Coastal Trail Project, when complete, will become one of the gems of the California Coastal Trail and a great community amenity.”

The trail and access improvements were identified in the 2004 Point St. George Management Plan (Plan), prepared collaboratively by the County of Del Norte, Conservancy, California State Parks, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation, and the Elk Valley Rancheria, with input from local residents.

Point Saint George is a scenic windswept headland located just northwest of Crescent City in Del Norte County, approximately fifteen miles south of the California-Oregon border. Del Norte is California’s northernmost county, with a population of just under 30,000 people, most of whom reside in the Crescent City area. Acquired by the County in 2002 in part with Coastal Conservancy funds, the 339-acre coastal terrace with its steep cliffs, offshore sea stacks, and crashing surf is increasingly appreciated and used by local people and Redwood Coast visitors.

Ownership of Point Saint George is split between four landowners, three public and one private. The County of Del Norte owns the largest portion followed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Wildlife Conservation Board.

The dramatic interaction of the ocean and rocky shore is exceptional at Point Saint George. The headland’s steep bluffs drop to rocky pocket beaches and intertidal shelves, some accessible by trail, others enclosed by towering cliffs and sea.

The State Coastal Conservancy has approved a grant to Smith River Alliance to conduct preacquisition planning activities and minor clean-up actions for beach, dune, wetland, upland, and forested parcels within and in the vicinity of the Pacific Shores Subdivision, adjacent to the Lake Earl Wildlife Area in Del Norte County, and to acquire those same parcels. This is a continuation of the Pacific Shores Acquisition Program.

“Nearly 80% of the unbuildable subdivision is in public ownership,” said Patty McCleary who has been working on this program since 2002. “We are grateful to continue this work, which allows me to speak to 2-3 lot owners a week to explain and explore their options.”

Lake Earl, the largest coastal lagoon south of Alaska, has long been identified as a critical natural resource, providing habitat for over 300 species of birds on the Pacific Flyway. Continuing the lot acquisition program will help to resolve the longstanding controversy over development in this sensitive area and advances the State’s 30X30 Executive Order goals for protection of conservation lands.

The project also reduces potential vulnerability to sea level rise. Pacific Shores subdivision has significant ocean frontage and is thus vulnerable to sea level rise. Acquiring lots from willing sellers will ensure that no development will occur. In addition, as additional lots are acquired, and entire blocks within the subdivision move into public ownership, there is an opportunity to remove existing roads and restore wetlands and dune habitat, thereby creating a landscape that may be more resilient to climate change.

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 Outdoors Access for All Act of 2018.