

SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY

Staff Recommendation
July 17, 2020

HERON'S HEAD PARK SHORELINE RESILIENCE PROJECT: PHASE 1

Project No. RA-017
Project Manager: Marilyn Latta

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$297,000 to the Port of San Francisco to implement native plant propagation, revegetation, invasive weed control, and community engagement and job training as part of the Heron's Head Park Shoreline Resilience Project in the City and County of San Francisco.

LOCATION: City and County of San Francisco; Measure AA Region: West Bay

MEASURE AA PROGRAM CATEGORY: Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program; Shoreline Public Access Program.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)
Exhibit 2: [Project Designs and Photographs](#)
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority adopt the following resolution pursuant to The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act, Gov. Code Sections 66700-66706:

“The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred ninety seven thousand dollars (\$297,000) to the Port of San Francisco for Phase One of the Heron's Head Park Shoreline Resilience Project. Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Authority the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Authority funding.

4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.

Staff further recommends that the Authority adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act, Gov. Code Sections 66700-66706.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with The San Francisco Bay Clean Water, Pollution Prevention and Habitat Restoration Measure (Measure AA).”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the Authority authorize a grant of two hundred ninety seven thousand dollars (\$297,000) to the Port of San Francisco (Port) for Phase One of the Heron's Head Park Shoreline Resilience Project (Exhibit 1, Location and Site Map).

The Heron's Head Park Shoreline Resilience Project (project) consists of restoring and enhancing wetlands and upland habitat along the Bay shoreline in Bayview Hunters Point to stabilize the shoreline and improve habitat. The overall project will provide beneficial native habitat enhancement improvements to an urban shoreline park in the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood, a diverse and economically disadvantaged community in southeast San Francisco. In addition to the habitat enhancement benefits, the project includes community engagement, local job training in green infrastructure activities, and workforce development.

To achieve the goals of the project, during Phase I, the Port and Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) will hire a team of four “Eco-Apprentices” and an experienced crew leader. The Eco-Apprentices will be low income transitional age youth (18-25 years old) with a passion for conservation, habitat restoration, and community engagement. Leveraging long-standing connections with San Francisco government agencies, environmental stewardship groups, schools, and youth-serving organizations active in southeast San Francisco, LEJ will recruit young residents of the Bayview Hunters Point community to be Eco-Apprentices on the Heron's Head Park Shoreline Resilience Project crew. These youth will be trained by LEJ and by researchers from San Francisco State University's Estuary and Ocean Science (EOS) Center in bay ecology, invasive weed control, native plant propagation and outplantings, and project monitoring.

During the first year of Phase I of the project, preliminary methods for weed control and plantings will occur in two test plots. This area is impacted by the invasive Algerian sea lavender which can degrade habitat values and reduce biodiversity. The test plots will enable the project team to refine planting plans with respect to native species representation and placement by soil type and marsh elevation. At the end of this assessment of the test plots, LEJ will use insights gained from test plantings to strategically propagate and plant approximately an additional 22,700 marsh plants grown over 20,000 – 30,000 square feet of intertidal zone. Habitat stewardship during this phase will include manual removal of invasive species and strategic replacement of native plants in cleared areas.

With intent to inform, build trust, and make the project culturally relevant to the surrounding communities, the Port and LEJ propose to present at up to four community meetings during the first year of the project. The Eco-Apprentice team will work with the Port to develop content and presentation materials and present the purpose, potential beneficial and adverse impacts, and desired outcomes of the project. They will give presentations to key stakeholders for the project, such as the following:

- Port Southern Waterfront Advisory Committee
- City and County of San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department's EcoCenter Advisory Committee
- Bayview Hunters Point Environmental Justice Taskforce
- India Basin Neighborhood Association
- Bayview Hunters Point Mobilization for Adolescent Growth in our Communities (BMAGIC) Parks Collaborative

These community outreach efforts will not only foster broader awareness of the project, they will also offer LEJ Eco-Apprentices the opportunity to develop their understanding of the scientific basis for the work they are doing and practice professional presentation skills. Additionally, these presentations may offer a vision to communities in southeast San Francisco of how nature-based shorelines may serve as an option for sea level rise adaptation.

The project's Measure AA application focused on stabilizing the shoreline using nature-based features, noting that, without shoreline protection, the wetlands are expected to erode significantly over the next 30 years. Authority staff's overview of Round 2 grant recommendations, presented at the June 2019 Governing Board meeting, included an initial recommendation of partial funding in the amount of \$1,100,000 toward a total cost of \$4,254,200. As the Port continues to seek additional funds to implement the full project, Authority staff and the Port have agreed to divide the project into two phases in order to reduce delay.

The board authorization requested now is for Phase I of the total project. Phase I, which will cost \$297,000, consists of initial site preparation activities including invasive weed control, planting native plants in weeded areas, native plant propagation, and initial community engagement including workforce development. Phase Two is expected to include habitat treatments in the intertidal and adjacent subtidal areas to protect the 7 acre wetland, including construction of a coarse grain cobble beach, installation of 5 rock groynes, and placement of approximately 80-100 oyster reef elements offshore. Phase I has independent value, regardless of whether Phase 2 is implemented.

The Port has submitted permit applications to all agencies through the Bay Restoration Regulatory Integration Team (BRRIT). The Port and the BRRIT held a site meeting in November 2019 and have held several coordination meetings to discuss BRRIT input to the design, which has been incorporated into the 65% design plans that have been completed. The Port is actively working to fundraise to complete the designs and implement the full restoration project from a variety of sources, including a \$1 million grant application that the Port and State Coastal Conservancy will submit in July 2020 to the USFWS National Coastal Wetlands Grant

Program. The Phase 1 funding requested now will start native plant habitat enhancements and community engagement that is planned to continue with the larger full project.

The Port owns and manages property along the southern San Francisco waterfront, including this parcel at Heron's Head Park. The Port has a strong track record of successfully managing projects that include community involvement and environmental enhancement, and has built multiple long-standing partnerships with local, state, and federal partners to accomplish these goals.

LEJ is a non-profit environmental education and youth empowerment organization created specifically to address the ecological and health concerns of Bayview Hunters Point and the surrounding communities of southeast San Francisco. LEJ trains youth for rewarding green careers, supports transformation of underutilized "brownfields" into public parks, and engages community volunteers to care for their open spaces. LEJ's native plant nursery, located in Hunters Point, specializes in growing locally adapted native species for shoreline and coastal upland habitats. The Port will purchase native wetland and transition zone plants from LEJ and hire LEJ's Eco-Apprentices (each crew comprised of four interns and one Crew Leader, described further below), to remove invasive species, plant natives, and maintain native marsh vegetation in the Project area.

The Estuary and Ocean Science Center (EOS) is housed at the Romberg Tiburon Campus of San Francisco State University. Senior Scientist Kathy Boyer and Staff Scientist Melissa Patten from the EOS Center will lead the effort to collect seeds and cuttings of the endangered California sea-blite (*Suaeda californica*, "Suaeda"), train and advise LEJ staff in Suaeda cultivation, planting, and arboring, and monitor and report on the success of Suaeda establishment. LEJ and EOS Center staff will work together to train LEJ's nursery staff and Eco-Apprentices to propagate Suaeda in their nursery and plant it at Heron's Head Park. Working alongside EOS Center staff will offer LEJ staff and interns meaningful work experience and exposure to careers in the field of ecological restoration.

The project includes a substantial education and outreach component, building on existing education and public engagement programs that have operated at the project site for over 20 years. Port partners in community engagement include the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department, Golden Gate Audubon Society, San Francisco K-12 schools, and City College of San Francisco. These and many other community-based organizations have created and/or participated in programs that engage the public in volunteering, studying and enjoying the project site. The Port has sought input from its Southern Waterfront Citizens' Advisory Committee, Golden Gate Audubon's Conservation Committee, and the EcoCenter Advisory Committee and will continue to broaden its community engagement in the project.

Site Description: Heron's Head Park is the result of never completed construction of Pier 98 in the 1970's. In 1998 the Port completed a wetland creation/enhancement project at the site to provide a variety of habitat types, including high intertidal/transition zone vegetation, tidal salt marsh, refugial islands, and tidal ponds. Improvements in the adjacent uplands include a 1/3-mile spur of the San Francisco Bay Trail, native plant landscapes, and the EcoCenter, an educational community center.

Heron's Head Park today is an approximately 21-acre peninsula, comprised of seven acres of

jurisdictional wetlands and tidal ponds, and 14 acres of public open space on San Francisco Bay. Restoration work will occur on fewer than five acres but will benefit the entire seven acre wetland. The site is owned and managed by the Port, located at the southern end of the Port's jurisdiction in the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood (**Exhibit 2**). The waterfront here and extending through San Francisco and San Mateo counties is highly urbanized, forming a lengthy shoreline with limited habitat for resident or migratory wildlife. Heron's Head Park is one of the few tidal marsh habitats along the San Francisco waterfront.

In the 20 years since the wetlands and park were created, the shoreline at Heron's Head Park has experienced subsidence of the fill soils, erosion from wind-waves and tidal flows, and a low supply of suspended sediment. These forces have caused a loss of both habitat acreage and ecological function. In the most impacted area, the shoreline has retreated up to 50 feet from its 1998 location, and one of the tidal ponds is consistently flooded rather than tidally flushed. The Port intends to address shoreline erosion through Phase 2 of this project.

The project site is a highly valued resource both for wildlife and public access and education. Federally or state-listed special status species that are present in the vicinity include North American green sturgeon, steelhead, Chinook salmon, and longfin smelt. The proposed activities will enhance native plant communities in the intertidal and upland areas of the site, which provide valuable habitat cover, nesting substrate, and food resources for a variety of birds and wildlife. The site has a significant infestation by invasive Algerian sea lavender, which will be addressed by Phase 1 of the project.

PROJECT FINANCING

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority	\$297,000
Others	\$0
Project Total	\$297,000

The Port will provide \$38,000 in in-kind staff time to manage the project.

CONSISTENCY WITH AUTHORITY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION, THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY RESTORATION AUTHORITY ACT:

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Act (SFBRA Act), Government Code section 66704.5, authorizes the Authority to grant funds for eligible projects. Consistent with Section 66704.5(a), the project is located in San Francisco City and County in the Central Bay, outside of the Delta primary zone.

The project is eligible for a grant under section 66704.5(b), which provides that an eligible project shall: "(1) Restore, protect, or enhance tidal wetlands, managed ponds, or natural habitats on the shoreline in the San Francisco Bay area, excluding the Delta primary zone". Both the Phase 1 and the overall project will restore tidal wetlands and natural habitats along the shoreline.

Funding the native plant propagation, invasive weed control, native outplantings, and monitoring for the project is consistent with SFBRA Act section 66704.5(e), which provides that the Authority may award grants for “all phases of planning, construction, monitoring, operation, and maintenance” of eligible projects.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

The project will help achieve the *Vital Fish, Bird and Wildlife Habitat Program's* goal to “significantly improve wildlife habitat that will support and increase vital populations of fish, birds, and other wildlife in and around the Bay.” This restoration project will enhance wetlands and provide upland transition zone for a number of important fish, bird, and mammal species of concern, including the salt marsh harvest mouse, Ridgway's rail, and numerous other shorebirds and songbirds. Upon completion of the invasive weed control and plantings of the project, the Port will provide for stewardship, maintenance and monitoring of the restored areas. The Port is committed to maintaining the marsh and parkland to ensure its benefits for future generations.

CONSISTENCY WITH MEASURE AA PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA:

1. **Leveraging resources and partnerships.** The restoration Project will leverage public/private partnerships that have been started by the Port, including the construction of the EcoCenter at Heron's Head park which was funded by the State Coastal Conservancy and other partners, and is operated by the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department.
2. **Economically disadvantaged communities.** The Project will benefit the economically disadvantaged community of Bayview Hunters Point in San Francisco. The community will benefit from visiting the enhanced habitat while using the trails and enjoying open space at the site; and through opportunities to learn about the native plantings and invasive weed control as part of educational programs at the EcoCenter.
3. **Benefits to economy.** The project will benefit the region's economy by providing jobs in plant propagation at LEJ's Candlestick Point Native Plant Nursery, and supporting green infrastructure job training and workforce development to four youth Eco-Apprentices in Bayview Hunters Point.
4. **Engage youth and young adults.** The project will provide field training on bay ecology, native plant restoration, invasive plant control, and project monitoring to four youth Eco-Apprentices from the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood. Gaining these skills will enable the apprentices to build their resumes and help them compete for professional jobs in the growing field of habitat restoration.
5. **Monitoring, maintenance, and stewardship.** The Eco-Apprentices will work with a crew leader from LEJ and with researchers from the Estuary and Ocean Science Center to monitor and maintain the native plantings and invasive weed control. They will implement two test plots to assess a variety of plant sizes, planting methods, and planting timing, in order to define the best practices for the full planting approach.

6. **Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.** The project is consistent with the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program's Criteria:
 - a. The project is supported by the Port Master Plan and by actions recommended in the Baylands Habitat Goals Science Update (2015) and San Francisco Estuary Institute's Adaptation Atlas (2018), which both recommend nature-based approaches to help wetlands adapt to sea level rise and other climate changes;
 - b. The project serves a regional constituency in the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhood in San Francisco, and is also a pilot demonstration project that will share information with other entities to encourage invasive weed control and native plant revegetation at other locations in San Francisco Bay;
 - c. The project can be implemented in a timely way- all partners are ready to start work in August 2020 if funding is approved;
 - d. The project provide opportunities for benefits that could be lost if the project is not quickly implemented as sea level rise is an urgent threat facing San Francisco Bay and these actions help to enhance native plant habitats that can continue to grow and become more robust over time; and
 - e. Includes in-kind staff time from the Port staff who will manage the project.

7. **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program.** The project is consistent with San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Coastal Management Program as it enhances native tidal wetland and upland transition zone habitats, and controls invasive species that impact wetlands in San Francisco Bay.

8. **San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy.** The project is consistent with the Joint Venture's Implementation Strategy as it includes actions to control invasive species and enhance native wetland and upland ecotone vegetation. The project is included on the Joint Venture's Priority Projects List, and the Port received a positive confirmation of support after consultation with Joint Venture staff prior to applying for funding.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The project is categorically exempt from review under CEQA Guidelines Section 15333 (14 Cal. Code Regs. §15333) as a small habitat restoration project, not exceeding five acres, to assure the restoration and enhancement of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife and with no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat, no known hazardous materials at or around the project site and, given the scale and methodology, no potential for cumulatively significant effects.

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

