

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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**Coastal Commission update on Big Sur grants from Sean Parker settlement**

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BIG SUR, Calif _ The \$1.5 million in grants resulting from the Coastal Commission's settlement with entrepreneur Sean Parker have substantially enhanced public access, recreation and the conservation of natural resources in the Big Sur area, according to a recent review by the agency.

"The idea that we were able to work with Sean Parker on a creative solution that resulted in trails being repaired, families learning about nature and at risk kids getting to camp near the ocean for the first time is incredible," said Lisa Haage, chief of the agency's enforcement division, which negotiated the settlement. "We were able to meet our Coastal Act goals in a creative and exciting way to resolve this case -- and the public reaps the benefits."

The grants were part of an agreement relating to activities leading up to Sean and Alexandra Parker's 2013 wedding at the Ventana Campground in Big Sur, and as a result of additional violations that were occurring at the Ventana Inn and Spa resort. The settlement featured financial commitments of \$2.5 million, more than half of which went towards grants for conservation and public access.

The money is being used by local non-profit and public organizations to enhance public access in the Big Sur area, including the creation of new and improved hiking trails, repair and reopening of long closed hiking trails, purchasing easements and funding a number of programs providing for underserved communities to reach and explore the coast. Over 25% of the grant funds were awarded to projects that enhanced and improved trails and public amenities within the California State Parks.

"These programs will touch so many people, especially underserved communities and at risk youth," said Coastal Commissioner Wendy Mitchell. "It's something the commission and the Parkers should be very proud of."

- **Big Sur Charter School -- \$75,000**

This public charter school developed a hands-on outdoor education program and curriculum for their K-8 students called the "Coastal Stewardship Program." Grant funding went towards hiring two part-time educators, outdoor excursions and educational activities.

Local children participated in weekly trips including whale watching, kayaking, hiking and collecting scientific data on sea level and sea temperatures. There were two family

camping trips to Molera State Beach and Big Creek Reserve. The grant money also paid for classroom labs to study ocean acidification, marine debris and fisheries depletion.

Funding also went towards a coastal stewardship program designed to encourage a deeper understanding of sustainability. Students took a coastal steward pledge designed by the commission's Public Education Program, and students hosted a community film event about plastic pollution. The stewardship program was so successful that even though its grant funding has been exhausted, the school plans to continue the program.

- **California State University -- \$200,000**

Cal State Monterey Bay's nonprofit, The University Corporation, used grant funds to provide coastal access to underserved children, youth and families in Salinas, Seaside and Monterey County through field trips, stewardship opportunities and environmental education.

As of June, grant funding allowed 1,050 children to participate in nature activities on water pollution, 480 children to go on a field trip to coastal areas and 510 children on a stewardship field trip to remove litter or improve the environment. In addition to this, 1,115 middle and high school students participated in volunteer events for Coastal Cleanup Day, Make a Difference Day and Earth Day. Additionally, 102 student assistant received guidance on environmental and ocean education leadership experience and 111 parents received training and materials to do educational activities with their families.

- **Coastal Conservancy/CA State Parks -- \$75,000**

The State Coastal Conservancy, in partnership with California State Parks, completed the restoration of one of the popular loop trails at Garrapata State Park, south of Carmel in January. This included the construction of 1100 feet of improved trail, two new overlooks and measures to protect against erosion.

- **Coastwalk California and Big Sur Property Owners Association -- \$75,000**

Coastwalk California, a nonprofit that advocates public access to the coast via the California Coastal Trail, is using grant money to develop an interactive mapping portal to support trail planning in the Big Sur/Monterey area. The Big Sur Coast Property Owners Association, also a non-profit, received funding to support the planning process for the trail through public meetings, website construction and maintenance and outreach.

Together, these projects will allow residents to help plan the California Coastal Trail through the Big Sur area. Users will be able to record multiple proposed trail alignments using drawing tools and to share these proposals in "real time." The two organizations are coordinating to create a final version of the website and planning portal, so the public can help plan the future location of the Coastal Trail in Big Sur.

- **Rancho Cielo -- \$184,000**

Rancho Cielo runs programs for at-risk youth in Monterey County, the vast majority of which have never seen the ocean. The grant funding will enable this nonprofit to host a total of four annual overnight camping trips to Big Sur for 10 years, to serve a total of

320 at-risk youth who are on probation. The trips will include probation officers, teachers, therapists and guides. The trips will focus on the local natural history, team-building activities

- **Save the Redwoods League/California State Parks -- \$345,000**

Save the Redwoods League in partnership with State Parks is working to reopen the Pfeiffer Falls Trail in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, which has been closed since 2008 due to wildfire damage. The eventual completion of this trail will result in restored access for the hundreds of thousands of annual visitor to Pfeiffer Falls.

To date, the Redwood League has completed work to the lower Pfeiffer Falls trails, which included removing asphalt and creating a new dirt trail that will lead up to the main Pfeiffer Falls trail. They have also completed a new kiosk and interpretive panel.

Construction of the main portion of the Pfeiffer Falls Trail is scheduled to occur in the fall 2016 and will feature a new ADA accessible portion. Trail work will also include re-routing parts of the trail to reduce impacts to the environment, working to stabilize stream banks, fixing damaged stairs and other conservation efforts.

- **Ventana Wilderness Alliance -- \$185,000**

This grant targeted the restoration and maintenance of trails in the Silver Peak Trail Network in southern Monterey County. To date, the alliance has restored a 2-mile segment of the Buckeye Trail, repaired minor damage on 1.5 miles of the Cruikshank Trail and performed spot trail repairs on 1.3 miles of the Buckeye Trail and the Soda Springs Trail.

Future plans include recruiting and training volunteers for trail maintenance and continued work on the Buckeye Trail, Soda Springs Trail and Salmon Creek Trail. The Alliance is seeking additional funding from other sources, and if granted, hopes to restore the entire Cruikshank and Salmon Creek trail

- **Ventana Wildlife Society -- \$250,000**

This nonprofit is focused on the conservation of native wildlife, including the California condor, and providing educational opportunities to the public. The grant enabled the Wildlife Society to purchase and maintain a passenger van for youth programs and will annually provide 150 underserved youth with free public access to the Monterey Peninsula and to Big Sur.

The programs include taking children to visit the woods, a week long day camp at Andrew Molera State Park, a two night program to learn about the condor, a weekly class providing trips to different locations in Monterey County, and trips to learn about Big Sur's ecosystem. As of April 2016, the Wildlife Society has provided public access to 1,333 youth through this grant program and grants from other sources.