

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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September 1, 2005

TO: CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

FROM: SUSAN M. HANSCH, Chief Deputy Director
REBECCA K. ROTH, Federal Programs Manager

Handwritten signatures of Susan M. Hansch and Rebecca K. Roth.

SUBJECT: **Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program** Information Item and
Public Comment at the Coastal Commission Meeting of September 14, 2005,
Item 24d.**Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program Background and Overview:**

The Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) is a federal program authorized by Congress in 2001 and administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). If fully funded, the program would provide \$60 million per year for grants that would be awarded on a nationally competitive basis to public agencies for land acquisition. In each eligible state, the CELCP would be administered through that state's coastal management program.

The federal CELCP statute describes the scope of the program as "protecting important coastal and estuarine areas that have significant conservation, recreation, ecological, historical, or aesthetic values, or that are threatened by conversion from their natural or recreational state to other uses." Public land acquisition projects may be considered for CELCP grants if they would be located within a state's coastal zone, as designated in the state's federally approved coastal management program or within the state's coastal watershed boundary as described by NOAA.

Eligibility for Grant Funds

The principal requirement for California projects to be eligible to compete for future CELCP grants is the preparation of a "conservation plan", a term derived from the federal guidelines for the program. Each state conservation plan is required to describe the types and extent of resource lands eligible for CELCP land acquisition grants, including the resource and policy information that would make these lands state priorities for public acquisition. These state conservation plans are subject to approval by NOAA, and NOAA will also establish national criteria for grant awards that would be applied in evaluating future grant applications.

CELCP will be administered through that state's coastal management program. California's federally approved coastal management program is comprised of three State agencies—the Coastal Commission, the Coastal Conservancy, and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). Because the State Coastal Conservancy is the only agency within the management program with the authority to acquire land, it has taken the lead on behalf of the coastal management program to prepare a CELCP Conservation Plan.

Draft CELCP Conservation

Representatives of the three agencies comprising the California Coastal Management Program (Coastal Commission, BCDC, and the State Coastal Conservancy), the three California National Estuarine Research Reserves (San Francisco Bay, Elkhorn Slough, and Tijuana River), and

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NOAA collaboratively prepared the draft CELCP Conservation Plan for California. As stated previously, the State Coastal Conservancy is the lead agency for purposes of plan submittal and administration of federal grant funds. In addition to the Coastal Commission meeting of September 14 2005, the draft CELCP plan will also be presented at public hearings of BCDC and the State Coastal Conservancy in September.

The draft Conservation Plan itself is comprised of statewide and regional priority acquisitions that were identified in State, regional, local, and nonprofit plans. Priority acquisitions are identified both textually and geographically with maps. The draft Conservation Plan has been prepared pursuant to the CELCP Final Guidelines and includes a description of the criteria that California will utilize in the solicitation, evaluation, ranking and selection of grant applications for submittal to NOAA, in the form of coastal recreation and resource land conservation priorities that have been approved by public agencies, such as local governments and land conservation organizations, within the geographic scope of the CELCP. The draft California Conservation Plan has been prepared for the purpose of establishing eligibility so that California projects may compete for future CELCP grants.

The California CELCP Conservation Plan will have no force of law and it is intended solely for use in conjunction with the evaluation of future CELCP grant applications. The Conservation Plan may be revised whenever necessary in accordance with further federal mandates for the CELCP or to reflect changes in California law or policies.

It is anticipated that the final California CELCP Conservation Plan will be submitted to NOAA for review and approval later in 2005. Once the plan is approved, California will be eligible to compete for CELCP grants.