



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Parks, Open Spaces, and Cultural Services

Subject: Approval of Contract with Environmental Science Associates for Coastal Lagoon and East Cliff Drive Resiliency Plan Feasibility Study

Meeting Date: June 24, 2025

Formal Title: Approve agreement with Environmental Science Associates, in an amount not to exceed \$604,849, to provide consulting services for the Santa Cruz Coastal Lagoons and East Cliff Drive Resiliency Plan feasibility study, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Approve contract with Environmental Science Associates in the amount of \$604,849 for consulting services for Santa Cruz Coastal Lagoons and East Cliff Drive Resiliency Plan;
2. Authorize the Parks Director to sign the agreement.
3. Authorize the Parks Director to make changes in scope or design, with concurrence of County Counsel, as may be required to meet project conditions.

Executive Summary

Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services (Parks) requests the approval of a contract with Environmental Science Associates (ESA) to develop a feasibility study for nature-based sea level rise (SLR) adaptation strategies for coastal lagoons along East Cliff Drive. The contract amount is not to exceed \$604,849.30, including a \$549,863 base amount and a contingency of up to \$54,986.30. The contract term extends from June 24, 2025 through February 28, 2028, or until completion of the project, whichever is later. The scope of work includes technical analysis, hydrologic monitoring, conceptual modeling, and community engagement to develop preferred adaptation strategies at three key lagoon crossings—Schwan Lagoon, Corcoran Lagoon, and Moran Lagoon. The resulting strategies will prioritize ecosystem enhancement, coastal access, infrastructure resilience, and long-term climate adaptation.

Discussion

East Cliff Drive is a critical transportation corridor that intersects with three major coastal lagoons in mid-Santa Cruz County: Schwan, Corcoran, and Moran Lagoons. These areas are especially vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise, including flooding, coastal erosion and damage to critical roadway and sewer infrastructure, reduction of coastal access, and habitat degradation. In response to this threat, the County is initiating a comprehensive planning effort to evaluate nature-based adaptation strategies that increase the resilience of these sites.

To select a qualified consultant for this complex planning effort, Parks conducted a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) process in collaboration with the General Services Department. The RFP was released on January 6, 2025, and closed on February 7, 2025. Eleven vendors were directly contacted. The County received three proposals, which were evaluated based on qualifications, approach, experience, and cost by a selection committee comprised of four staff from Parks, Community Development & Infrastructure (CDI), State Parks, and the State Coastal Conservancy. The three top-

ranked firms were invited to participate in interviews. Following this competitive process, Environmental Science Associates (ESA) was selected as the most qualified consultant team based on their technical expertise and experience, their demonstrated success in lagoon restoration and climate adaptation, their cost-effective modeling approach, and their robust proposed approach to stakeholder, community, and tribal engagement. County staff completed successful negotiations with ESA to modify their proposed scope and fee to align with the goals and budget of the project. The contract recommended for Board approval reflects the negotiated scope and fee.

The proposed contract with Environmental Science Associates (ESA) will support the development of the Santa Cruz Coastal Lagoons and East Cliff Drive Resiliency Plan. ESA brings significant expertise in lagoon restoration, climate adaptation, and coastal engineering, and has designed a scope of services tailored to the specific needs of this project in collaboration with Parks and State Parks staff.

Under the contract, ESA will conduct a planning-level feasibility analysis for each lagoon, incorporating sea-level rise modeling, hydrologic monitoring, and community input. The scope of services includes eight main tasks:

1. Project Management and Kickoff – Coordination of project activities, development of a website, and documentation of meetings.
2. Review of Existing Resources – Compilation and synthesis of existing data relevant to lagoon conditions and adaptation.
3. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Coordination – Facilitation of six TAC meetings and integration of partner agency input.
4. Monitoring – Field studies and data collection on lagoon conditions to inform modeling efforts.
5. Modeling – Development of predictive models to evaluate potential adaptation strategies under various sea level rise scenarios.
6. Preliminary Adaptation Strategies – Identification of multiple adaptation concepts for each lagoon.
7. Community and Interested Party Engagement – Inclusive and bilingual outreach including community meetings, digital surveys, and a web-based StoryMap.
8. Preferred Alternative Development – Selection and documentation of the most viable strategy for each lagoon, suitable for future design and permitting.

The deliverables will include a suite of technical reports, community and stakeholder engagement materials and documentation, preliminary adaptation strategies, and a final preferred alternative report that identifies a recommended adaptation option for each site. These outputs will inform future environmental review, design, and implementation phases and will position the County to apply for additional external funding that will be necessary to fund future work.

The total contract cost will not exceed \$604,849, which includes a 10% contingency amount to accommodate unforeseen needs that may arise during the course of this complex, multi-year project. Approval of this contract is a critical step in advancing the County's efforts to proactively plan for and adapt to sea level rise in vulnerable coastal areas.

Financial Impact

The total cost of the contract with Environmental Science Associates is not to exceed \$604,849, which includes a base contract amount of \$549,863 and a contingency of up to \$54,986. Sufficient funds are available under account 494000-62376/RP0030 (Planning – Planning Services) through the State Coastal Conservancy (Grant Agreement No. 23-165). No new County General Funds are needed nor requested.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - County Facilities & Infrastructure, Plans, Policies & Budgets,
Community Voices & Partnership
Operational Plan - Sustainable Environment, Reliable Transportation
Climate Action - Transportation

Submitted By:

Jeff Gaffney, Director of Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.