

**CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT OF 1990
HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND GRANT PROGRAM
PROJECT APPLICATION FORM**

TRAILS CATEGORY

PROJECT NAME Buckeye Trail Construction at Marks Ranch		Grant Request Amount \$ <u>33,100.00</u>	
		Required Match Amount \$ <u>36,750.00</u>	
		TOTAL PROJECT COST \$ <u>69,850.00</u>	
GRANT APPLICANT (agency and address, include zip code) Monterey County Parks P.O. Box 5249 Salinas, CA 93915		COUNTY Monterey	
		PROJECT ADDRESS (OR NEAREST CITY) Salinas	
		NEAREST CROSS STREET Portola Drive	
APPLICATION CONTACT PERSON			
Meg Clovis, Cultural Affairs Manager		clovism@co.monterey.ca.gov (831) 755-4913 (831) 755-4914	
Name (typed or printed) and Title	Email Address	Phone	Fax
PERSON WITH DAY-TO-DAY RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PROJECT IF DIFFERENT FROM AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE			
Casey Nielsen, Deputy Chief Ranger		nielsenr@co.monterey.ca.gov (831) 758-3604	
Name (typed or printed) and Title	Email Address	Phone	Fax
GRANT APPLICANT'S REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORIZED IN RESOLUTION			
Dr. Lew Bauman, CAO or his designee		baumanl@co.monterey.ca.gov (831) 755-5115	
Name (typed or printed) and Title	Email Address	Phone	Fax
For acquisition projects, project land will be _____ Acres to be acquired in fee simple by applicant. _____ Acres to be acquired as permanent easement (explain): _____ _____		For enhancement or restoration projects, land tenure is: 724.00 Acres owned in fee simple by applicant. _____ Recordation number(s) (attach additional sheet if necessary) _____ _____ Acres available under a _____ year lease. _____ Acres other interest (explain): _____ _____	
GRANT SCOPE: I represent and warrant that this APPLICATION PACKET describes the intended use of the requested GRANT to complete the RECREATION FEATURES and MAJOR SUPPORT AMENITIES listed in the attached GRANT SCOPE/Cost Estimate Form. I declare under penalty of perjury, under the laws of the State of California, that the information contained in this APPLICATION PACKET, including required attachments, is accurate.			
SIGNED			DATE
	Grant Applicant's Authorized Representative as shown in Resolution		
NAME	Dr. Lew Bauman or his designee		

GRANT SCOPE/Cost Estimate Form

GRANT SCOPE: Construct 1.4 mile trail at Marks Ranch, install 1 trail sign and 4 interpretive signs, install 1 trail bench and 2 picnic tables, install 1 pedestrian gate.

GRANT SCOPE ITEMS - RECREATION FEATURES			
Trail staking		5,000.00	5,000.00
Permit Fees		7,150.00	7,150.00
			0.00
			0.00
			0.00
	Subtotal:		
	\$ 0.00	\$ 12,150.00	12,150.00
GRANT SCOPE ITEMS - MAJOR SUPPORT AMENITIES			
Construct 1.4 mile trail	21,630.00	20,000.00	41,630.00
Design, fabricate and install trail sign and interpretive signs	10,000.00	4,600.00	14,600.00
Install 2 picnic tables	720.00		720.00
Install 1 trail bench	250.00		250.00
Install pedestrian gate	500.00		500.00
	Subtotal:		
	\$ 33,100.00	\$ 24,600.00	
	Total:		
	\$ 33,100.00	\$ 36,750.00	
TOTAL PROJECT COST			\$ 69,850.00

APPLICANT'S MATCH Sources (by name and date committed)	Total
Cash donation from Parks Foundation of Monterey County	\$5,000.00
Monterey County Parks	\$7,150.00
In-kind Labor (Biologist)	\$140.00
Force Account Labor	\$24,460.00
Total of MATCH Sources	\$36,750.00

Notes:

- This form will be used to establish the expected GRANT deliverables
- All of the RECREATION FEATURES and MAJOR SUPPORT AMENITIES listed on this form must be completed and open to the public before final grant payment is approved.
- Match must be committed at the time of application.

HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND PROGRAM 2012

Grant Submitted by the County of Monterey

1. NEED

Marks Ranch is located 3.6 miles from the City of Salinas in Monterey County, adjacent to 4700 acre County of Monterey's Toro Regional Park. Once a major egg production facility, the 816 acre ranch ceased operations as such several years ago and has remained virtually untouched and in private hands as grazing land until the property was purchased by the Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) in 2007. In 2010 the County of Monterey, through its Parks Department (MCPD) received a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board to purchase 624 acres of the Marks Ranch and then received a second grant in 2012 to purchase another adjoining 113 acres. Both parcels border the County's Toro Regional Park, adding significant opportunities for expanding the existing park's trail system. BSLT has retained 79 acres of the Ranch which is currently leased for cattle grazing.

The majority of Marks Ranch is located on the Toro Creek watershed which drains into the Salinas River. Rolling hills and canyons dominate the topography. Seven plant habitats can be found on the property including grasslands, northern mixed chaparral, central coast scrub, coast live oak woodland and savanna, riparian woodland, sandy outcrop and wetland vegetation. A 2009 study¹ identified Marks Ranch as an important link within a local wildlife corridor, providing species connectivity from Fort Ord, the Santa Lucia Range and the Ventana Wilderness. The North American badger, mountain lions, bobcats, gray fox, deer, coyotes, raccoons, turkeys and other small mammals use

¹ Central Coast Connectivity Project – Northern Monterey Linkage Report. Big Sur Land Trust, 2009.

this corridor as a nexus between upland habitats in the south and the coastal plains to the north.

The MCPD and BSLT have been working together for over five years to manage Marks Ranch and to carry out mutual goals. One critical goal is to open Marks Ranch to the public through a system of trails. Marks Ranch is currently inaccessible to urban residents. However the need for access to a wildlife area such as Marks Ranch is great, especially for residents in nearby Salinas. At 7,588 people per acre, Salinas' density is substantially higher than the national average. This is even more apparent in east Salinas where the population density is greater than Manhattan in New York City, with more than 33,000 people living in one square mile. Salinas residents have very limited access to wildlife areas. Within the city limits, there are nine developed "pocket parks", averaging five acres each. A combined total of 8 miles of neighborhood trails, in a suburban setting, serve 155,000 residents. None of these trails give residents access to natural wildlife areas.

The MCPD and BSLT have an on-going cooperative relationship to carry out the goals of the Marks Ranch Management Plan. Property management priorities include providing trails for public access to Marks Ranch, interpreting the diverse habitats and wildlife, and protecting and maintaining the important wildlife corridor.

2. Meeting the Need

With the purchase of Marks Ranch, Monterey County has an opportunity to provide a new recreational trail for the public in a pristine wildlife area that is accessible, both physically and geographically. The new trail, to be known as the *Buckeye Trail*, will be 1.4 miles long. It will begin at Toro Park's Buckeye Picnic area, located at the former

boundary between Marks Ranch and Toro Park. An accessible restroom facility is located directly across from the proposed trail head. The first quarter mile of the trail will travel through oak woodlands overlooking Marks Creek, a seasonal tributary to Toro Creek. Following the contours of an old cattle path, the trail will lead out of the oak woodlands to an open meadow. More than 90 species of spring wildflowers flourish in these grasslands. The trail will skirt the meadow, passing future picnic tables sited at intervals beneath oak shaded recesses. At the far end of the meadow, the trail rounds a low hill and opens into a second meadow at the mouth of a canyon. Here, water is wicked from the upper reaches of the property and creates seasonal wetlands that support a variety of hydrophytic species such as rabbit's foot grass, iris-leaved rush and starwort. At this point, due to the fragility of the wetlands, the trail will lead from the meadow to the old ranch road. This dirt road is canopied by old oaks and winds up to the original Marks Ranch House. The ranch house will be the future location of an interpretive center as well as the trail head that will lead to the upper reaches of the ranch and connecting trails into Toro Park.

The **Buckeye Trail** will address the deficiencies outlined in Criterion #1 by:

- Providing a public trail into the former Marks Ranch property which is currently inaccessible to urban residents.
- Providing nearby access to a wildlife area for urban residents.

3. Site Access

A) The Buckeye Trail will be accessed through Toro Regional Park. Entrance fees into the park are currently \$6 per vehicle Monday through Friday and \$8 per vehicle on the

weekends with 8 people maximum per vehicle. An annual pass is currently available for \$75 and visitors can walk into the park for free.

B) Onsite parking is available at the trail head (the Buckeye picnic area) and includes 50 paved parking spaces and 4 ADA spaces.

C) The trail will be easily accessible via automobile, bicycle and public transportation.

Toro Park is located on the Monterey-Salinas highway (Hwy. 68) and is accessible from the Portola Ave. exit. There are two existing class two bike routes that lead from Salinas to Toro Park. In addition, the Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC) has secured funding for the Spreckels Blvd./Hilltown Rd. bike path. This class one route, scheduled to start construction in 2013, will cross the Salinas River bridge and lead to Portola Dr. Monterey-Salinas Transit bus stop across from Toro Park at the Toro Park estates subdivision. An underpass currently leads from the bus stop to the park entrance so pedestrians and bicyclists do not have to cross highway traffic.

D) Toro Park offers flexible hours in order to accommodate visitors. The park is open from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. during the winter, from 8:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. in the spring and fall, and from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. during the summer.

E) There are over 50 miles of trails currently available between Toro Park and Fort Ord/BLM lands that are within ten miles of Salinas. However, one of the greatest barriers to these trails is their rugged and steep terrain that on average requires a four mile minimum investment. The terrain and length appeal to avid hiking enthusiasts rather than those who may prefer a more accessible trail. The advantage of the Buckeye Trail is affording public access to a wildlife area without the necessity of physical stamina that the other trails require. As part of the trail planning process,

Monterey County Parks contracted with an engineering company to lay out the trail so it will be ADA accessible. In addition, picnic tables and the trail bench will be accessible (see Trail Plan sheet D1). An accessible pedestrian gate will be constructed near the former boundary between Marks Ranch and Toro Park (see Trail Plan sheet PP1). The old Ranch Road is not used for public vehicles but it is used by both MCPD and BSLT vehicles to access the back country. To accommodate pedestrians, five turn-outs, sited every 300 feet, will be constructed on the road portion of the trail. These trail improvements will prevent any physical barriers for public use.

4. Stakeholders

Monterey County and Big Sur Land Trust have made a concerted effort to involve interested parties in creating an overall vision for Marks Ranch which has led to the planning for individual park components such as the grazing plan and the planning of the Buckeye Trail. In 2005 the Marks Ranch Advisory Committee was created that included 15 business and community leaders. This committee, with input from BSLT and MCPD, identified priorities for Marks Ranch which included developing a public trail system. From November 2006 to January 2007, BSLT and MCPD co-hosted community open house events to solicit additional input regarding proposed uses of the property. These meetings led to the identification of three principle stakeholders at that time including 1) the Ventana Wildlife Society (VWS), who has been conducting interpretive hikes on the property for youth, 2) the Monterey County Parks Foundation's naturalists, who plan on expanding current interpretive programs at Toro Park into Marks Ranch once public trail access is established and 3) the Boys and Girls Club of Monterey

County, have discussed developing nature education programs for East Salinas kids in a wildlife area setting.

Once the Buckeye Trail was located², the MCPD hired the Whitson Engineering Company to ground-proof and design the trail, keeping the principles of universal design as a primary goal. The resulting trail plan meets best practices as recommended in the *Draft Final Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas*.³ In May, 2011, the MCPD sought input from the Monterey County Commission on Disabilities regarding the Buckeye Trail's accessibility. The Commission reviewed and approved the trail design.

5. Capacity

A) Design to Maximize Sustainability: The Buckeye Trail is designed to withstand use and weather, will be easy and pleasant to use and will minimize maintenance and erosion. The most vulnerable part of the trail to erosion is the three foot section that winds through oak woodlands. To prevent erosion the trail will traverse the hillside's natural slope, so water will be redirected across and off the trail. In addition, the grade does not exceed 8.33% (see plan pages PP1 and PP2). The four foot section of the trail begins at the first meadow. Again, the trail will skirt the perimeter of the meadow so it can be outsloped and protect the sensitive meadow habitat (see plan pages PP2 and PP3). At the intersection of the four foot trail and the old ranch road, a culvert will be constructed to assist with drainage. A new graded swale along the road will help with road drainage which has sections of sandy soil.

To date, trail construction documents, engineering and flagging have been completed. BSLT owns the road portion of the trail and a pedestrian access

² The trail's location was based on recommendations found in the *Marks Ranch Vision Plan: Access, Education and Preservation*, 2011.

³ U.S. Access Board, 2009.

easement was finalized between BSLT and MCPD as part of the County's purchase agreement for the adjoining property. MCPD has experience in grant administration and project management, completing projects on time and on budget. MCPD has received and administered grant projects for capital improvement projects from the CA. Department of Boating and Waterways, the Land and Conservation Fund, Proposition 12 – Parks Bond Act and Proposition 40 – Resources Bond, among others. Project outcomes will be monitored to ensure intended standards which include visitor safety, trail integrity and resource protection. The Buckeye Trail has been designed with maintenance in mind and a moderate to low maintenance standard level of care has been established. A maintenance program will be established and carried out by MCPD staff taking into account routine, annual and cyclical maintenance. Along with periodic inspections, repairs will be made based on user reports.

6. Connections

The Buckeye Trail will connect neighborhoods, school sites and employment locations to a wildlife area. The Toro Park Estates subdivision is located directly across the Salinas-Monterey Hwy. from Toro Park (1 mile from Toro Park entrance). Within the subdivision is the Portola Plaza shopping area (1 mile from Toro Park entrance) w/ 8 businesses. The Toro Park Elementary School is 1.5 miles from the Toro Park entrance. One of our principle goals is to connect residents from Salinas' most populated areas to wildlife areas. On average, Toro Park attracts 100,000 visitors annually. Of these, approximately 80% are Hispanic and from the areas MCPD wish to target. The trail head, located at the Buckeye Picnic area – one of our most popular picnic areas – will

draw park visitors to the trail. Project stakeholders, including BSLT and the VWS, regularly bring youth groups from Salinas to Marks Ranch for outdoor programs.

7. Sustainable Design Features

The Buckeye Trail incorporates sustainable design features in order to enhance user enjoyment while protecting sensitive habitats. The trail has been surveyed and flagged by Whitson Engineers and the conceptual plan, trail sections and profile are attached.

A) The first half of the trail is a curvilinear design that meanders through oak woodlands and follows the topographical contours of the hillside. The second half of the trail is the eight-foot-wide old ranch road.

B) The Buckeye Trail gains 496 feet in elevation over 1.4 miles from the Buckeye Picnic Area to the old Andrew Marks Ranch House. The steepest grade along the trail is 8.33%. There is no need for steps or any other complex trail structures.

C) Trail construction will not require the use of turnpikes, causeways, puncheons/boardwalks or other structures.

D) The trail design will incorporate a combination of direct and indirect management techniques to encourage on-trail use and discourage off-trail travel. Fencing will be used as a direct management technique to keep visitors on the trail and cattle off the trail.

BSLT and MCPD use cattle grazing on portions of Marks Ranch as a resource management tool. Currently there is fencing running the length of the old Marks Ranch Road which will keep cattle on BSLT property and visitors on the trail. Two types of signs will be used as an indirect management technique and will include prescriptive messages that encourage visitors to stay on the trail and educational messages that describe sensitive resources and how to protect them. MCPD worked with a biologist

when designing the trail in order to identify sensitive habitats along the route. The biologist suggested a total of 4 interpretive signs and will work with MCPD to develop interpretive content.

E) The trail design utilizes all natural materials. Picnic tables and benches along the trail will be made of recycled materials.

F) The Buckeye Trail has been designed with a hardened trail surface (class 3 aggregate base) which will provide a durable tread for users, including those in wheelchairs, while taking into consideration the soil capability, grade and seasonal use.

G) The MCPD worked with biologist Scott Hennessey during the design of the Buckeye Trail. Mr. Hennessey made 4 site visits and concluded that the trail alignment is routed through primarily coastal live oak woodland, wet meadow and riparian habitat. He concluded that none of these habitats will be impacted by the project (see attached report).⁴

8. Interpretation Opportunities

There are opportunities to interpret natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources at different points along the Buckeye Trail. Several of these interpretive opportunities were noted in the biological evaluation on Marks Ranch and MCPD will be working with the same biologist on content for interpretive signs.

A) The Marks Ranch Biological Evaluation suggested several interpretive opportunities for natural resources along the trail including oak woodlands, acorn woodpeckers, mountain lions and mule deer, wet meadow habitat and sycamore trees.

⁴ Hennessey, Scott. Biological Evaluation for Mark's Ranch Recreational Trail Project. February 28, 2012.

B) Archeological studies indicate that members of the Ohlone tribe occupied the Toro Park area.⁵ The Ohlone uses of acorns as a principle food source, as well as their use of seeds gathered from meadows, are some of the interpretive opportunities along the Buckeye Trail.

C) The Buckeye Trail terminates at the Andrew Marks Ranch House. The Marks family bought the ranch property in 1890 and built one of the largest egg ranches in California during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, ranch lands have been grazed for over 100 years, demonstrating a historic continuum in land use. Both the Marks Ranch history and grazing history are appropriate interpretive opportunities at the trail's end.

D) The first third of the trail traverses a hillside above a seasonal creek, through relatively undisturbed oak woodlands. An overlook is planned in this area, including a bench and an interpretive sign about oak woodlands. The open expanses of the two meadows are particularly beautiful, especially when spring wildflowers are in bloom. Picnic tables and an interpretive sign about the wildflowers are planned for this area (see Trail Plan sheets PP2 and PP3).

Eventually, the Andrew Marks Ranch House will be converted into an interpretive center for the entire Ranch however this interpretive opportunity is not applicable to this project.

9. Trail Plan

BSLT prepared two Plans that address trails at Marks Ranch, including the *Marks Ranch Management Plan* which identifies Monterey County Parks as the responsible

⁵ Gamber, Josef. A Preliminary Archeological Survey of Toro Regional Park, Monterey County, California. 1979.
Breschini, Gary. The Cultural Resources of Toro Vista. 1980.

agent for developing public trails at Marks Ranch. And the *Marks Ranch Stewardship Grazing Plan* which addresses the integration of the grazing management program with a public trails system.

In 2010 BSLT contracted with the California Center for Land and Water Stewardship, CSU Pomona, to develop an overall Vision Plan for Marks Ranch which led to the publication and adoption of the *Marks Ranch Vision Plan: Access, Education and Preservation* in 2011. The Vision Plan included a trail plan, locating three loop trails in the upper reaches of Marks Ranch and the Buckeye Trail that links the future interpretive center with Toro Park's Buckeye Picnic area. Although trail priorities were not ranked, the Buckeye Trail fulfills more of the Plan's recommendations than the back country trails, specifically 1) improve trail connectivity into Toro Park; 2) build more ecologically diverse trails to enhance the visitor experience; 3) locate new trails to minimize views of adjacent housing developments and preserve views from Toro Park. In addition to the Vision Plan, Goal PS-10.1 (Trails) in Monterey County's General Plan, adopted in 2010, states:

Ensure that a network of publicly accessible trails, which will link existing and future public parklands, open spaces and transportation routes is planned for, acquired, and dedicated in Community Areas and Rural Areas with the North County, Coastal, TORO (emphasis added), Carmel Valley, and Cachagua planning areas. Policy PS-10.1.8 states that trail linkages in the Toro Park area shall be given a high priority.