



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-18-154  
Meeting 18-42  
December 12, 2018

## AGENDA ITEM 8

### AGENDA ITEM

Partnership support for Tunitas Creek Beach and Cowell-Purisima Trail

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

1. Approve a request for a one-time contribution of \$500,000 to support the natural resource restoration, public access improvements, and management of Tunitas Creek Beach, and long-term management of the nearby Cowell-Purisima Trail, which is a segment of the California Coastal Trail.
2. Adopt a resolution increasing the Fiscal Year 2018-19 budget and appropriation for the General Fund by \$500,000.

### SUMMARY

The Peninsula Open Space Trust and San Mateo County are requesting a one-time contribution of \$500,000 to support the natural resource restoration, public access improvements, and management of Tunitas Creek Beach, and long-term management of the Cowell-Purisima Trail (a segment of the California Coastal Trail). This contribution would leverage an additional \$8.2 million of funding secured for San Mateo County to restore and open the beach to public access within the next three years, and maintain and manage Tunitas Creek Beach and the nearby 3.6-mile Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail over the long-term. Consideration of a funding contribution is consistent with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) Vision Plan Portfolio 30: Support California Coastal Trail. General Fund revenues are available to set aside for such a contribution.

### DISCUSSION

On September 25, 2018, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) received a letter from San Mateo County and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) regarding a joint project to raise funds for the restoration and long-term management of Tunitas Creek Beach and the nearby Cowell-Purisima Trail (Attachment 1). POST and San Mateo County are collaborating to protect and manage the 58-acre Tunitas Creek Beach property located eight miles south of Half Moon Bay. The property sits along an expansive, one-mile stretch of beach with no developed public access. The property contains diverse wildlife habitat and other natural resources that have been severely impacted by inappropriate and illegal use (Attachment 2). Restoring the natural resource and open space values of this property is of high priority, as this recently acquired property now forms part of the network of protected lands and wildlife corridors on the Coastside. The property, which is located across Highway 1 and directly adjacent to the District's Toto Ranch area of Tunitas Creek Open Space Preserve, also opens the door to connecting District land to the coastline via trail.

The 3.6 mile Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail is located approximately 3 miles north of Tunitas Creek Beach. The trail is currently open only on weekends and holidays. The project funding will open the trail to the public seven days a week. Eventually, the District’s Purisima-to-the-Sea trail, which is part of Measure AA Portfolio 3, will connect the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail to the Bay Area Ridge Trail through Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve.

The estimated project budget for this work is \$10 million, of which POST and the County have secured \$8.2 million. The District’s contribution would bring the total amount raised to \$8.7 million. The total budget breaks down as follows (including a stewardship fund for future maintenance):

**Preliminary Project Budget**

Phase	Cost
Property Acquisition	\$5M
Site Development - Trail and Parking - Ranger Station/House - Restrooms - Habitat Restoration	\$4M
Stewardship Fund	\$1M
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$10M</b>

POST has acquired the property and the County has committed to take on the long-term management and operations. POST and the County are currently in the early stages of a multi-year site development planning process to prepare Tunitas Creek Beach for public visitation. A citizen’s advisory committee has been formed to inform this process. POST will initially hold the Stewardship Fund. In the future, POST intends to transfer the property, and possibly also the dedicated Stewardship Fund, to the County.

The County expects to spend approximately \$1 million annually to manage and operate the beach and trail. The County has approved five (5) new positions for operations and management, including two park rangers, two park aides, and a capital projects manager.

This project fits within the District’s Vision Plan under Portfolio 30: Support California Coastal Trail. The description of this portfolio is to “encourage, facilitate, and partner to complete and manage the California Coastal Trail on the San Mateo Coast”. The Tunitas Creek Beach project directly ties in with the Coastal Trail, including the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail segment, which opens the opportunity for the District’s future Purisima-to-the-Sea trail to become part of a larger, regional trail connection extending from the coastline to the ridgeline.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The request for a contribution of \$500,000 would be funded via a budget amendment, increasing the appropriation for the Fiscal Year 2018-19 budget by the same amount. The General Fund has sufficient revenues available.

The request from POST and the County is for a one-time contribution. The County will assume all operating costs (approximately \$1 million per year). The Stewardship Fund of \$1 million is designated for future capital repairs (after opening) as well as future significant (non-routine) maintenance needs.

California Public Resources Code section 5546 empowers the Board of Directors to contribute funds to outside entities for the purpose of assisting in the acquisition of lands or for improving the lands, when the acquisition or improvement is located and planned as to be of benefit to the District. As described herein, the project will provide regional trail connections and supports the recreational, open space, and natural resource values associated with those connections.

### **BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW**

The Action Plan and Budget Committee (ABC) held a meeting on November 20, 2018. Supervisor Horsley from San Mateo County and Mr. Moore from POST were in attendance to answer committee questions. The Committee voted to forward the proposed contribution to the Tunitas Creek Beach project to the full Board of Directors for review and approval.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

### **CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act and no environmental review is required.

### **NEXT STEPS**

If the item is approved by the full Board, the General Manager will direct staff to administer the budget amendment and the funding contribution.

#### Attachments:

1. Request letter from County of San Mateo and POST, dated 09/25/2018
2. Tunitas Creek Beach information booklet
3. Resolution increasing the Fiscal Year 2018-19 budget and appropriation for the General Fund by \$500,000.

Responsible Department Manager:  
Ana M. Ruiz, General Manager

Prepared by:  
Stefan Jaskulak, Chief Financial Officer



September 25, 2018

Ana Ruiz, General Manager  
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
330 Distel Circle  
Los Altos, CA 94022

Re: Partnership Support for Tunitas Creek Beach and Cowell-Purisima Trail

Dear Ana:

We respectfully request the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (Midpen) support for public access opportunities and natural resource restoration work on the San Mateo Coast. Specifically, we request a one-time contribution of \$500,000 from Midpen as a critical part of the \$10 million Tunitas Creek Beach fundraising campaign. This contribution will leverage an additional \$8.2 million of funding secured for the County to open a new public beach within the next three years and establish an endowment for County Parks to maintain and manage Tunitas Creek Beach and the nearby 3-mile California Coastal Trail over the long-term.

Supporting sustainable public access at Tunitas Creek Beach and regional trails like the California Coastal Trail aligns with Midpen's mission statement and Vision Plan (Priority Action #30: Support California Coastal Trail). Interest in coastal recreational opportunities is on the rise. A new County Park at Tunitas Creek Beach will complement Midpen's own efforts to meet this increasing demand with your recent opening of Lower La Honda Creek OSP. Moreover, ensuring that the long-term management and maintenance of the California Coastal Trail supports Midpen's goals for ridgeline-to-the-sea trail corridors to connect people from Midpen Preserves to the San Mateo County coastline.

POST, the County of San Mateo, and County Parks are collaborating to protect the 58-acre Tunitas Creek Beach property located eight miles south of Half Moon Bay. The property sits along an expansive one-mile stretch of beach with no developed public access. The property contains diverse wildlife habitat and other natural resources that have been severely impacted by inappropriate and illegal use. Restoring these natural resources is a goal of this project as we add to the network of protected lands and wildlife corridors on the Coastside. The property, located across Highway 1 and directly adjacent to Midpen's Toto Ranch, also opens the door to a future regional trail connection to link visitors from Midpen lands to a known, popular coastline destination.

In November 2017, with the support of the County, POST purchased the Tunitas Creek Beach property for \$5 million, and entered into a License and Management Agreement with County Parks

to manage the property. Last year the County also enacted several new ordinances to better manage ongoing illegal and destructive activities on the beach.

Having secured the property, County Parks and POST are now working closely to develop the infrastructure, facilities, and access onsite to support safe and sustainable public access to the beach. We estimate that development of these resources will cost an additional \$5 million.

In addition, the County is stepping up to provide the staffing resources needed for ongoing management of the beach. On April 10, the County Board of Supervisors approved a funding request from County Parks for five new positions (two Park Rangers, two Park Aides, and a Capital Projects Manager). We are already seeing the positive impact of these additional resources and improvements the County has made onsite to allow administrative and emergency access to the beach. Illegal activities and the associated degradation of natural resources and public safety concerns have decreased significantly compared to last summer. The County's new staff resources will also provide additional patrol and management of POST's Cowell-Purissima Trail to allow daily access to this three-mile section of the California Coastal Trail as originally envisioned by POST and the Coastal Conservancy. For Tunitas Creek Beach, when fully opened to the public, County Parks anticipates ongoing annual operation and management costs of approximately \$1 million.

We are also pleased to report that fundraising for Tunitas Creek Beach is going well. There has been significant interest among POST's donors in supporting this project. In addition, the County secured \$5 million in funding from the State in this year's budget dedicated to developing this new park and protecting and restoring natural resources on the beach and along Tunitas Creek. To date, we have raised a total \$8.2 million towards our \$10 million goal. **A one-time \$500,000 grant from Midpen** would further demonstrate the tremendous community support for this project and the collaborative approach that we and our other partners take to stewarding the lands of this region. It would also be a critical step towards meeting our fundraising goal within the next year, in advance of the transfer of the property to the County in 2019.

Thank you for your continued support and strong partnership between our organizations and for considering this request. Should you have any questions or need any additional information in support of this request, please do not hesitate to reach out.

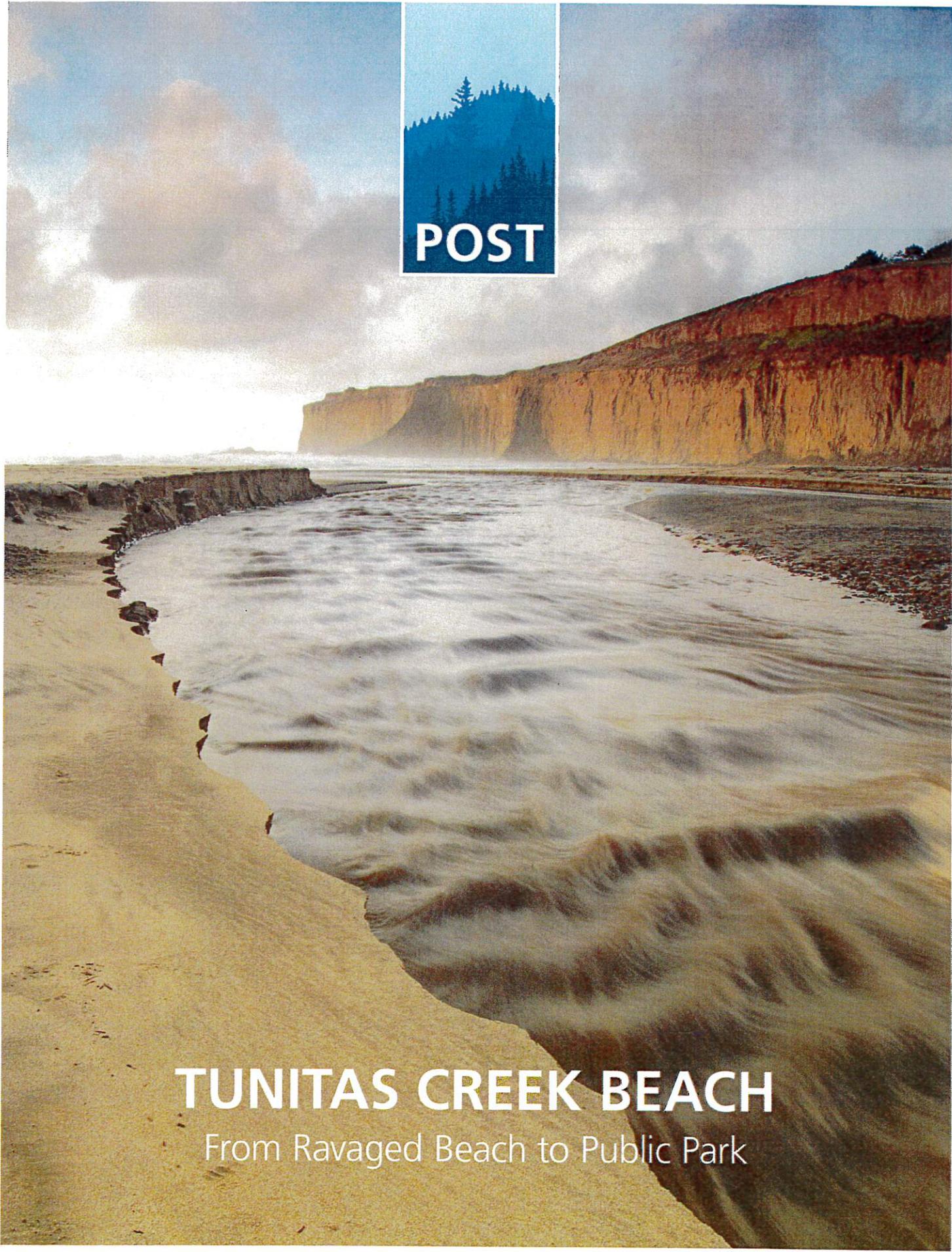
With best regards,



Don Horsley, District 3 Supervisor  
San Mateo County Board of Supervisors



Walter T. Moore, President  
Peninsula Open Space Trust



# TUNITAS CREEK BEACH

From Ravaged Beach to Public Park

## Welcome to Tunitas Creek Beach

At Tunitas Creek Beach, we have an opportunity to create a new, world-class public beach that provides a safer experience for all visitors, and also protects and restores the area's sensitive natural resources.

**Tunitas Creek Beach is a coastal gem:** an expansive one-mile stretch of beach framed by iconic steep cliffs at the intersection of Tunitas Creek and Highway 1, south of Half Moon Bay.

The creek and surrounding areas have historically provided habitat for the San Francisco garter snake, California red-legged frog, steelhead trout, and Coho

salmon. Tunitas Creek Beach has been identified as the northern limit of the California sea otter population.

The site had been used for centuries as an Ohlone seasonal village and was a stopping point on the Spanish Portola Expedition. The entire beach and surrounding properties had been in private ownership for more than 100 years.



## The Challenge

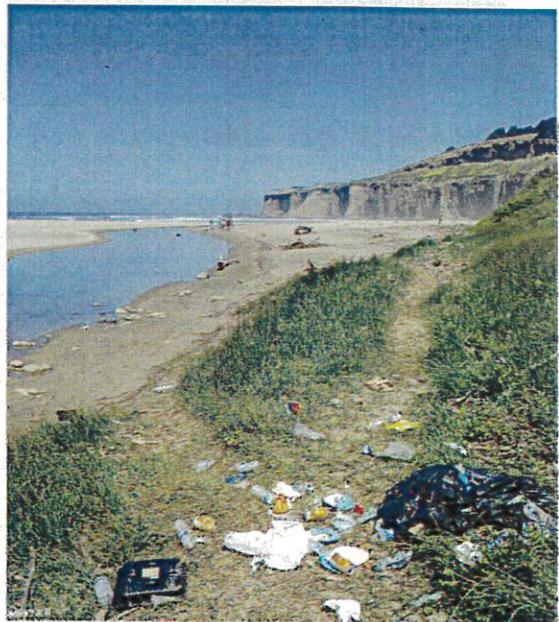
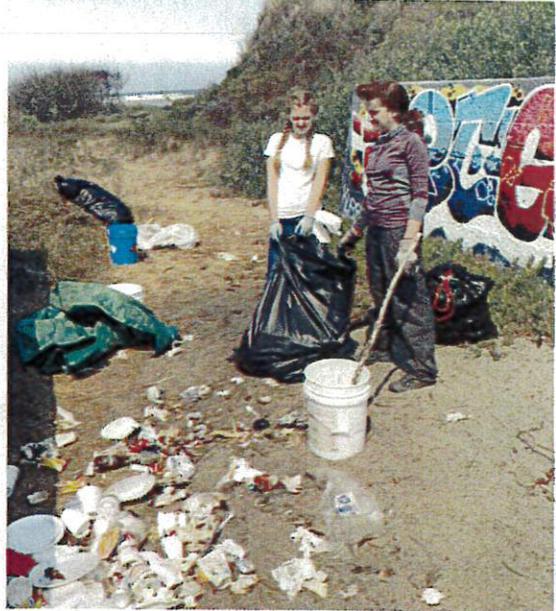
Until recently, this beach was a mostly secret destination for surfers, fishermen, and small numbers of local beach-goers. However, in recent years, excessive trespassing has severely escalated as the remote beach was “discovered” and shared widely through social media. Overnight campers have been coming in droves to take advantage of the isolated beach with very large-scale organized parties. Access down the steep cliff sides is very dangerous, and emergency personnel face challenges when responding to increasing numbers of emergency calls.

The creek bed is also being used as a trail route from the road to the beach by both foot traffic and all-terrain vehicles, damaging the habitat in and around the creek.

The area around the creek—the coastal riparian forest—is being cut down for beach bonfires, causing bank erosion along the creek and disrupting the breeding and development of aquatic species. People are trampling rare plants, such as the coastal march milkvetch, and disrupting the nesting sites of the threatened Western Snowy Plover.

With no garbage service or restrooms, the beach, sand dunes, and creek have been littered with disturbing amounts of trash and human waste. Much of the trash and human waste that is left on the beach is flowing directly into the ocean and Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. **In just 2 years, nearly 9 tons, or 18,000 pounds, of garbage have been removed by a local volunteer group.** These volunteer cleanup efforts have been heroic, but only temporarily help and cannot keep up with the challenge long-term.

These are just some of the activities that have been causing significant environmental degradation and creating unsanitary conditions on the beach. **We knew something needed to be done to protect this beach, and fortunately, with your help, there can be a brighter future for Tunitas Creek Beach.**





A portion of the 58-acre property that will become a new public beach. The existing structure and surrounding areas will become the future site of a ranger station, safe trail and other important public access amenities.

## The Opportunity

One of POST's central goals is to increase and enhance public access to special places like Tunitas Creek Beach. In this instance, we were very fortunate to work with a landowner who supported our vision of creating a public beach and was willing to negotiate with us before putting the property on the open market.

To launch phase 1 of this project, POST purchased a 58-acre beach front property from this willing seller and immediately entered into an agreement with San Mateo County to manage the property. Eventually, POST will transfer the property to County Parks.

POST is also partnering with the County on improvements that are critical to both public enjoyment and conservation enforcement, including an official parking area, restrooms, and a safe trail to the beach. Because on-site park ranger presence is key to ensuring that destructive activities are prevented long-term, a ranger station will also be designed and constructed. **POST's involvement in this project beyond the acquisition of the land is expected to dramatically expedite the timeline to fully open the beach to the public.**

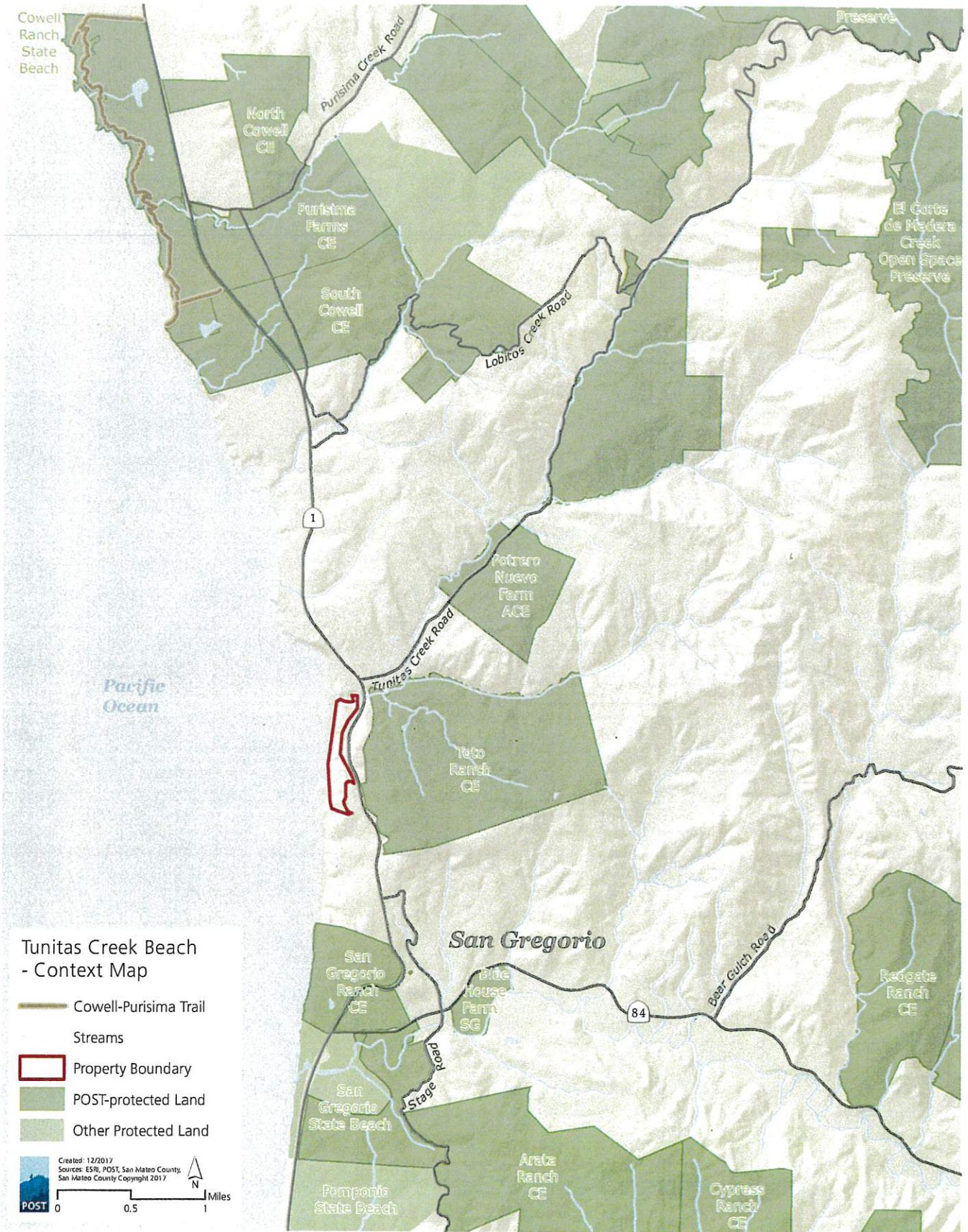
The County has already committed to providing two full-time rangers for Tunitas Creek Beach and are working to add two more, in addition to support from the Sheriff's Office. Furthermore, several partners are contributing to a Stewardship Fund, which will act as an endowment to provide long-term funding to care for the land.

**POST's partnership with the County at Tunitas Creek Beach will also benefit the Cowell Purisima Trail**, a public POST-created trail four miles to the north. In return for POST's establishment of a Stewardship Fund, the County will assume management responsibilities for the 3.5-mile Cowell-Purisima Trail, allowing this popular trail to be open seven days a week.

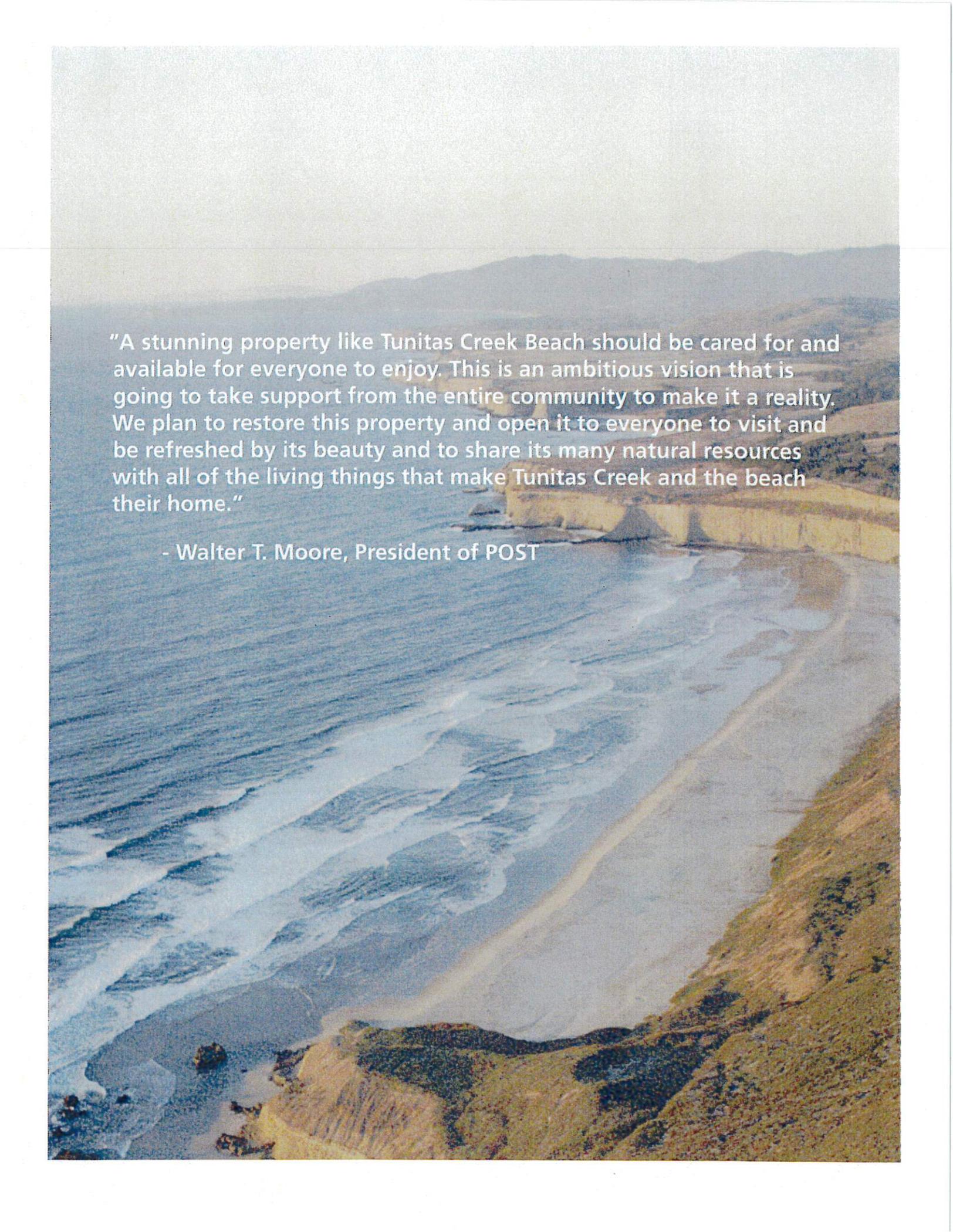
### Preliminary Project Budget

Phase	Cost
Property Acquisition	\$5M
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<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$10M</b>





Tunitas Creek Beach is located 8 miles south of downtown Half Moon Bay. The area shown in red is the 58-acre property that POST purchased in November 2017. As part of our partnership, County Parks will also take on management for the 3.5-mile Cowell-Purisima Trail, allowing for this popular trail to once again be open 7 days a week.



"A stunning property like Tunitas Creek Beach should be cared for and available for everyone to enjoy. This is an ambitious vision that is going to take support from the entire community to make it a reality. We plan to restore this property and open it to everyone to visit and be refreshed by its beauty and to share its many natural resources with all of the living things that make Tunitas Creek and the beach their home."

- Walter T. Moore, President of POST



## Protecting and restoring Tunitas Creek Beach will continue POST's legacy of coastal conservation

In addition to adding another stretch of protected coastal habitat, this project will also help close the gap between previously protected properties and expand the California Coastal Trail.

**By supporting this project, you will preserve sensitive natural resources and create a new public beach that will be enjoyable for all, now and for generations to come. In addition, your support will protect sensitive species, like the snowy plover, and reduce creek and ocean pollution.**



A **special donor recognition site** is planned to commemorate the major donors whose generosity helped create this new beach. This site will provide a unique opportunity for supporters to honor or memorialize a loved one along a stunning stretch of California's coast.

**TOP** Tunitas Creek has historically provided habitat for threatened steelhead trout and endangered Coho salmon.

**BOTTOM** Tunitas Creek Beach has 13 habitat types, including Coastal Dunes where threatened Western Snowy Plovers have been spotted.

## Partnering with POST

We believe that places like Tunitas Creek Beach belong to everyone. With the support of our partners and donors, we look forward to preserving this beautiful place forever in a way that benefits both the environment and our entire community at the same time.

POST respectfully requests your consideration of a special gift to create a new public beach and protect a stunning and biodiverse coastal property.

With your support, we will:

- Protect and restore habitat for endangered and threatened species
- Reduce ocean pollution and improve water quality
- Reduce public safety risks
- Create a new public beach along the scenic San Mateo Coast that will be accessible, safe, and more enjoyable for all!

It's not everyday that we have an opportunity to create a new public beach. This is truly a remarkable opportunity and we thank you for your consideration of support for this exciting project.



Peninsula Open Space Trust  
222 High Street  
Palo Alto, CA 94301  
650-854-7696

[openspacetrust.org/tunitas](https://openspacetrust.org/tunitas)

**RESOLUTION 18-\_\_**

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT AUTHORIZING AN AMENDMENT TO THE BUDGET AND ACTION PLAN FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018-19 BY INCREASING THE DISTRICT GENERAL FUND BUDGET IN THE AMOUNT OF \$500,000 TO FUND THE RESTORATION, SITE IMPROVEMENTS, AND MANAGEMENT OF THE TUNITAS CREEK BEACH AND COWELL-PURISIMA TRAIL.**

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**WHEREAS**, San Mateo County and the Peninsula Open Space Trust approached the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (“District”) for a one-time funding contribution of \$500,000 to support natural resource restoration, public access improvements, and management of Tunitas Creek Beach, and long-term management of the Cowell-Purisima Trail, which is a segment of the California Coastal Trail; and

**WHEREAS**, California Public Resources Code section 5546 empowers the District to contribute money to a municipality or nonprofit organization for the purpose of assisting in the acquisition of lands or for improving the lands, when the acquisition or improvement is located and planned as to be of benefit to the District.

**WHEREAS**, the 3.6 mile Cowell-Purisma Coastal Trail is located approximately 3 miles north of Tunitas Creek Beach, and the District’s funding contribution will eventually help connect the District’s Purisima-to-the-Sea trail to the Cowell-Purisima Coastal Trail and to the Bay Area Ridge Trail at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Directors of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District does hereby resolve as follows:

**SECTION ONE.** The Budget and Action Plan for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District for Fiscal Year 2018-19 is amended to increase the District General Fund budget in the amount of \$500,000 to fund partnership support for Tunitas Creek Beach and Cowell-Purisima Trail.

\* \* \* \* \*

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on \_\_\_\_\_, 2018, at a regular meeting thereof, by the following vote:

- AYES:**
- NOES:**
- ABSTAIN:**
- ABSENT:**

**ATTEST:**

**APPROVED:**

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Secretary

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President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board of Directors

\_\_\_\_\_  
Board of Directors

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
General Counsel

I, the District Clerk of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution duly adopted by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District by the above vote at a meeting thereof duly held and called on the above day.

\_\_\_\_\_  
District Clerk