

## CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

45 FREMONT STREET, SUITE 2000  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105-2219  
VOICE (415) 904-5200  
FAX (415) 904-5400  
TDD (415) 597-5885

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### Coastal Commission 2015 in Review: Protecting the Coast, Preparing for Climate Change

The past year brought major successes to the protection of California's coast and the legacy of the California Coastal Act, a visionary law signed by Governor Jerry Brown in his first term nearly 40 years ago. The Coastal Commission protected sensitive coastal and marine resources from Crescent City to San Diego, and defended the public's right to access and share in Californian's amazing coastline, while approving most of the developments that it reviewed. In October, the Commission took bold action by asking Sea World to end its captive killer whale breeding program in California. In November, the Commission advanced the cause of gender equality in big wave surf competition. And just this month, the Brown administration endorsed in its budget for 2016-17, the Commission's proposed conversion of the temporary three million dollar Local Coastal Program (LCP) pilot program to an on-going baseline general fund budget increase to support the Commission's work with local governments to protect the coast.

The coastal program also continued to look to our future, including the challenge of preparing for and adapting to climate change. The Commission unanimously adopted comprehensive guidance for local government and project applicants to address sea level rise along the coast – a high policy priority for the state and nation. And it continued to strengthen its partnership with local government to build resilient communities, overseeing millions of dollars in local coastal program (LCP) grants and approving dozens of LCP plan amendments faster than ever.

California has perhaps the strongest coastal protection law in the country, with 12 appointed and 3 *ex officio* Commissioners who volunteer their time, and a professional civil service staff, reviewing local coastal plans and new developments every month in public hearings to assure that the statewide policies of the Coastal Act are being fulfilled. California's citizens actively participate in the coastal program, which was born from the public activism and passage of Proposition 20 in 1972. This public support for the mandates of the Coastal Act has always been an essential part of successful coastal protection in our state, and it will continue to be critical as California faces tremendous resource management challenges, ranging from providing environmentally-sustainable community water supplies to protecting public beach access for all Californians.



The Coastal Commission meets every month up and down the coast. In October, they met in the Long Beach Convention Center where they considered SeaWorld's proposed expansion of the killer whale facility and the Newport Banning Ranch residential and commercial project.



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Betty Yee, Chair, State Lands Commission  
Brian P. Kelly, Secretary, Transp. Agency

## Working with Local Governments to Protect the Coast

In 2015 the Commission continued to set a high bar for protecting coastal resources through effective local coastal planning and regulation. The agency acted on 76 amendments to Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) and other planning items, including: approving a comprehensive update of the City of San Diego’s [Ocean Beach Community Plan](#); fast-tracking a critical amendment to provide [wastewater treatment capacity](#) in Malibu; completing significant work on the [Marin County Implementation Plan](#); and updating the [Laguna Beach Implementation Plan](#) to address water quality protection.

**The LCP Program.** The Commission’s LCP program is the core implementation mechanism of the California Coastal Act.

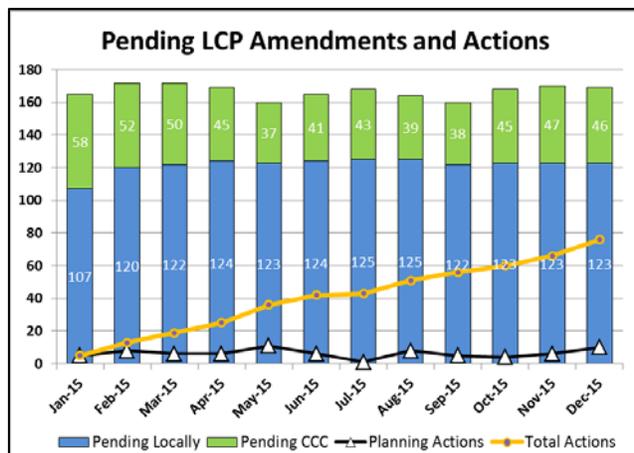
LCPs establish the allowable types, locations, and intensities of development in the coastal zone to achieve statewide resource management goals while providing for local community planning and development objectives. The Coastal Commission works closely with 76 coastal local governments to manage the coast across 126 planning segments, including to address such issues as shoreline hazards, sustainable water supplies in coastal communities, protection of sensitive habitats, wetlands, agriculture, and scenic landscapes, and maintaining public access and recreational facilities for a growing population.



The Ocean Beach Community Plan was updated, including to address sea level rise, public access and new standards for the California Coastal Trail.<sup>1</sup>

Sixty-one (61) counties and cities are now the lead coastal permitting agencies under a Commission-approved LCP. And 10 of the 15 communities that have yet to finish an LCP and assume permitting authority are actively working towards that end with grant funding from the Commission and the Ocean Protection Council (OPC). Many LCPs also need to be updated, to address predicted sea level rise due to climate change and other critical coastal management concerns. Unfinished and out-of-date LCPs lead to conflict and delays in development approvals, and ultimately, less effective resource protection and management for our state.

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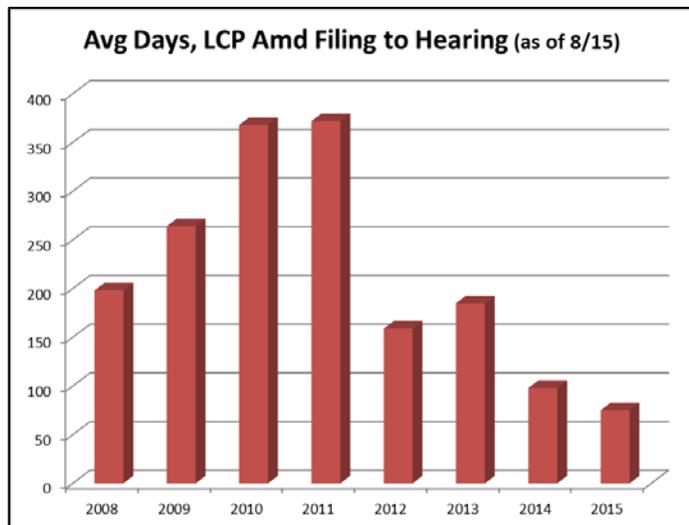


**Critical Budget Support.** Fortunately the LCP program continues to garner critical budget support from the Governor and the Legislature, with additional funding for Commission staff and \$3 million of grant funding to support LCP updates in the Governor’s budget last year. In January of 2016, the Governor’s budget includes the Commission’s [request](#) to convert \$3 million in temporary funding to an on-going increase in the Commission’s baseline budget for 25 staff planning positions. If sustained by the

legislature, this increase will maintain the significant boost in the Commission’s capacity to update LCPs, particularly to implement adaptation to sea level rise along the coast. Thank you Governor Brown for this important support of coastal management in California.

### **Streamlining Planning and Improving Partnerships.**

The state’s investment in the Commission’s LCP program continues to pay great dividends. In addition to the increased on-going LCP update and adaptation planning work, the Commission has been able to dramatically reduce the average processing time for LCP amendments (see Chart). This is good for local governments, the Commission, the development community and the public.



Additional planning capacity has enabled the Commission to work with local governments more closely, frequently and earlier in the local process to resolve issues. It has also increased collaboration generally (staff now is able to meet and coordinate regularly with many local jurisdictions), and has improved partnerships between the state and local governments. In November, representatives of local government joined the Commission in Half Moon Bay for a [third workshop](#) about the LCP program. Participants widely recognized the improvements in the program in recent years and discussed the on-going challenges of implementing statewide policy objectives through local regulatory programs. The second half of the workshop focused on issues related to addressing sea level rise (see below).

### **Enhancing and Enforcing the Public’s Right to Access the Coast**

2015 was another great year for public access along the coast, building on the success of [2014](#). The Commission’s new administrative penalty authority enabled the Commission to resolve public access violations at a much higher pace than ever before. As reported to the Commission in [August](#), the Commission has yet to levy a monetary penalty with its new authority, but it has resolved many access cases quickly with the new credible deterrent of potential fines. The enforcement program resolved 24 access cases in 2015 alone, with 9 more partially resolved or awaiting full implementation of the agreed upon resolution; many more are being worked on.

Many of the Commission’s monthly planning and regulatory actions implement its mandate to protect and maximize public access and recreation. Some of these actions may take several years to come to fruition, and there was much to celebrate in 2015.

In July, the Commission and the public celebrated the opening of the Carbon Beach West access in Malibu. Like many accessways in urban areas, the Carbon Beach West access was hard fought, but after many years of perseverance, including several administrative hearings and orders issued by the Commission and litigation support from the Attorney General, the

Commission reached agreement with the landowner to open the required access to this incredible stretch of beach. This path is the third public walkway to Carbon Beach, joining the Zonker Harris accessway, which was opened in 1983 and named for a character in the comic strip Doonesbury, and the Carbon Beach East path, opened in 2005. The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) will manage the accessway on behalf of the public.



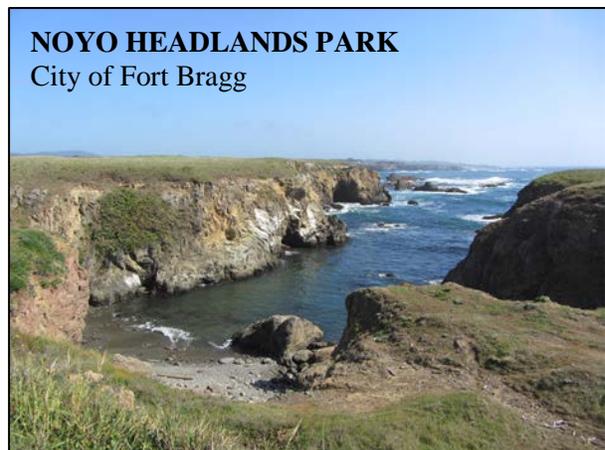
On the Central Coast, the City of Santa Cruz opened the Arana Gulch multi-use pathway – about 1 mile of ADA trails that maximizes public access and educates the public about the nearby



sensitive riparian and grassland habitat while also protecting it from disruption. This trail also connects to city bicycle paths to the east and west, promoting the reduction of automobile use and their greenhouse gas emissions. The Commission approved the trail with the [Arana Gulch Master Plan](#) in 2011 after working with the City and other stakeholders to find a balance between

access goals and the need to protect and restore sensitive coastal terrace prairie habitat, including Santa Cruz tarplant, popcorn flower and purple needle grass.

On the North Coast, Commission and local efforts to plan the reuse of an 82-acre former lumber mill site for Coastal Act priorities were partially realized. The City of Fort Bragg opened public access to the blufftop site, including to pocket beaches, along 4.5 miles of new ADA accessible California Coastal Trail. The project includes parking lots, restrooms, interpretive signs, welcome plazas and several “art” benches. The new trail is known as Noyo Headlands Park.



And in April, the Executive Director joined others to commemorate the opening of the Cameron Nature Preserve and Zev Yaroslavy Coastal Slope Trail. The Coastal Commission contributed \$1,000,000 from the Violation Remediation Account (VRA) to this significant acquisition by the MRCA. The 703-acre preserve protects significant environmentally sensitive habitat in this rare mediterranean climate biome protected by the County's LCP, with a range of plant communities including chaparral, coastal sage scrub, native grasslands and oak woodlands.



**Of Fire Rings and Big Wave Surfing.** 2015 was an interesting year for Commission public access regulatory decisions also. In June the Commission acted to protect the ability of the public to enjoy the lower cost recreational experience of gathering around a beach fire in [Newport Beach](#), consistent with a recent South Coast Air Quality Management District's rule for addressing the potential health impacts of wood-burning on nearby homeowners. Many citizens from inland areas come to the beach to enjoy the social experience of gathering around a beach bonfire. Ultimately the City of Newport Beach and Commission staff worked out a compromise plan that allows both charcoal and wood fuel in the fire rings within the City. Dozens of people participated in the Commission's hearing on both sides of the issue. The City of Huntington Beach, which doesn't have residences as close to the beach, underscored the importance of the beach fire experience to its local coastal economy.

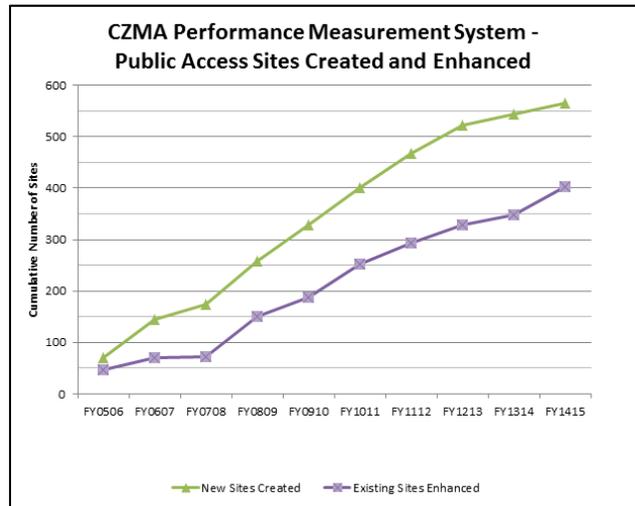


In December, the Commission considered the bonfire question in Carmel. While the Commission [denied](#) the city's permit to limit beach fires on a split vote, Commission staff committed to working with the City in the spring to explore alternative beach fire management programs to address the serious public health and recreation concerns of the Commission, the City and the public.

The Commission considered public access issues of another sort in November, when it reviewed a proposal to manage public access to and along the shoreline when the Mavericks big wave surfing contest is held. Over the years, growing crowds of people hoping to view the event from the shoreline has resulted in risks from breaking waves to the public, as well as damage to surrounding property and sensitive habitats on the adjacent bluffs. Commission staff worked with the County of San Mateo and the event sponsor to identify acceptable public access

management measures for the day of the event. The Commission adopted the [staff recommendation](#), but it also took up a concern raised by the public about whether the event was sufficiently open to women surfers. The Commission added a special condition requiring the event sponsors to develop a plan showing how women would be given an equal opportunity to participate in future events at Mavericks, consistent with the Coastal Act’s mandate to maximize public access for all citizens.

Over the year the Commission also saw its usual array of plans and projects that raised public access issues, ranging from seawalls to highway improvements. In December, the Commission approved the staff-recommended plan worked out with the property owner to allow the redevelopment of the Back Bay Landing site in upper Newport Harbor for visitor-serving and residential uses. The plan provides for boating facilities and new public access along the shoreline and to a previously inaccessible private pocket beach. Overall, the Commission continues to address its priority mandate to protect and enhance existing accessways, and create new accessways, as well-documented by the public access performance measure that the Commission reports to the federal Coastal Zone Management Program at NOAA every year.



**Coastal Access Information and Training.** In July, the Commission released a new public access web tool – the [Your Coast](#) web mapping application that provides detailed information about more than 1,450 public accessways up and down the coast. The information comes from the Commission’s *California Coastal Access Guide*, now in its 7<sup>th</sup> edition, with more than 83,000 copies sold.

In the fall of 2015 Commission staff had a valuable opportunity to train local law enforcement in LA County about the Coastal Act and some of the Malibu accessways highlighted in the *Your Coast* app. The catalyst for this training was an incident of private security guards harassing beach goers, which prompted a Commission staff investigation and encounter



that was widely reported in several newspapers both locally and internationally (e.g., <http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/05/us/malibu-day-at-the-beach/index.html>). During the encounter, the LA County Sheriff’s office was called and two Deputies arrived at the beach. Although Commission staff presented evidence to show that staff was located on a public access easement

and had the legal right to be on the dry sand, the Deputies did not have enough background information to help identify the public beach area.



Following the incident Commission staff contacted the Sheriff's office to discuss the issue, which led to a training opportunity with the sheriff deputies and legislative staff in the Lost Hills Station to explain the Coastal Act, public beach rights and access easements, and the Commission's program and enforcement tools, and to provide the deputies with beach easement maps prepared by the Commission's public

access and mapping units, with [links](#) to on-line and print access guides produced by the Commission and its partners in protecting coastal access. The Captain in charge made it clear that understanding and protecting the public's beach access rights was a high priority; 30 deputies attended the training.

## **Protecting and Providing Affordable Places to Stay on the Coast**

Protecting lower cost overnight accommodations on the coast – another important kind of coastal access long-protected by the Commission – remained a high priority in 2015. The Commission held a second [Workshop](#) in March to consider the economics of hotel development and opportunities for public-private partnerships, lower cost accommodations facilitated and funded by the State Coastal Conservancy, and an analysis of overnight accommodations in the Port of San Diego. The Commission anticipates a third workshop in the spring of 2016 to assess various policy options for even stronger protection of affordable accommodations going forward.

In addition to the March workshop, the Commission approved several projects that will enhance affordable overnight opportunities on the coast. In January, the Commission approved the redevelopment of the [Ranch at Laguna Beach](#) that planned for 97 higher cost rooms, and other supporting hotel amenities, with a requirement to also provide at least 12 free overnight camping events a year on the site for non-profit groups, including for underprivileged youth and scouting groups. The approval also included a \$250,000 mitigation fee to support completion of a connecting trail from inland open space to the shoreline, as well requirements to address water quality and sensitive habitat on the site.

In February, the Commission approved the proposal of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and MRCA to provide camping for disabled and special needs persons and seniors at [Ramirez Canyon](#), as well as develop trails, picnic and restroom facilities.

In August, the Commission made two more significant decisions. First, the Commission approved the [Crummer LCP amendment](#) for the City of Malibu to allow residential development on a bluff site previously planned for visitor-serving uses, with a required \$4 million in lieu fee going to the MRCA to develop new affordable camping facilities to serve the public and

disadvantaged and foster youth at the recently acquired Cameron Nature Preserve at Puerco Canyon (see above).

At the same meeting, the Commission also denied an amendment to the [Port of San Diego Master Plan](#) that was nearly identical to an [amendment](#) heard by the Commission in July of 2014 that had been withdrawn by the Port just before Commission action. The amendment proposed to provide up to 500 rooms in three separate hotels, but without any specificity or commitment to providing affordable accommodations somewhere on the public trust lands held by the Port. Currently there are over 8000 overnight accommodations in the Port, but only 237 are considered lower-cost (the Chula Vista RV Resort) – less than 3% of the total. The Port of San Diego has since sued the Commission over its decision to deny the amendment.

The September meeting brought another Commission denial, this time of an after-the-fact application to demolish two lower-cost motels (57 and 33 units) and build the 164-room, high cost [Shore Hotel](#) in Santa Monica. The Commission had previously approved a new 164-room low to moderate cost hotel on the site, but the conditions of the permit were not complied with and subsequently the high cost hotel was built and opened for business. The Commission is also now in litigation in this matter.

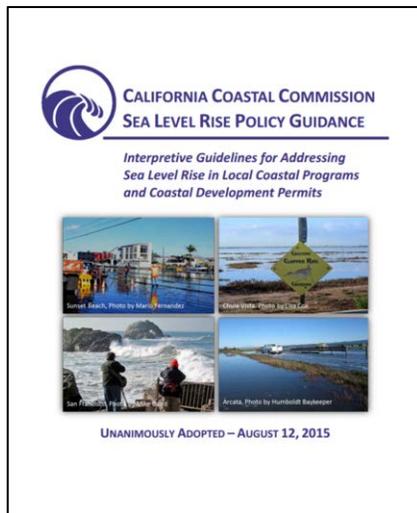
Finally, in October the Commission approved the Lido Hotel in Newport Beach – a 130 room higher cost boutique hotel. To address the Coastal Act requirement to provide lower cost accommodations, the staff and the applicant worked together on a \$1.4 million fee requirement to support lower-cost camping, or other overnight accommodations in conjunction with an outdoor educational program for disadvantaged youth from Title 1 schools, as defined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, potentially at nearby Newport Dunes. The Program will serve a minimum of 350 students per year, provide a minimum of 3-night stays, and will operate at least 10 years from the



commencement of the Program based upon the initial funding. The educational component will focus on ocean safety, coastal and marine ecology, coastal hazards, and other coastal-related topics and include water-oriented recreational activities such as kayaking, boating, swimming and surfing. These kinds of opportunities are important not only to provide access to the coast, but to build and maintain a sense of coastal stewardship in our citizens.

## Preparing for Climate Change: Building Community Resilience

The Commission continued to push forward on climate change in 2015. In August, the Commission unanimously adopted comprehensive [Sea Level Rise guidance](#) for local



governments and project applicants. The guidance discusses broad principles for addressing sea level rise and building community resilience consistent with the Coastal Act, and provides detailed technical, legal, planning, and regulatory guidance for assuring that new development is sited and designed to avoid and minimize future coastal hazards from rising seas. The guidance also addresses the challenges raised by any proposed redevelopment of properties that are already in a coastal hazard zone. The guidance is a critical piece of the state's larger climate change strategy, [Safeguarding California](#), which among other things calls for the updating of LCPs to reduce risks from sea level rise. For the last several years the Commission has been an active partner in the State Coastal Leadership Group on Sea-level Rise, led by the Ocean

Protection Council and including the State Lands Commission, the Coastal Conservancy, the SF Bay Conservation Development Commission, State Parks and the Natural Resources Agency.

Almost every month, the Commission confronts difficult questions about infrastructure, new development and redevelopment along hazardous and eroding shorelines. This year's El Nino has also been putting a bright spotlight on the challenges we will increasingly face on the coast from sea level rise, erosion, and flooding, especially at the so-called [King Tides](#) (the highest tides of the year).

Protecting important shoreline public infrastructure is a Commission priority. In March, the Commission approved a rebuilt revetment to protect the Pacific Coast Highway at [Las Tunas](#) beach in Malibu, and incorporated four new vertical public beach accesses and a blufftop trail into the project. In June of 2015 the Commission approved the interim protection of Highway One at [Surfer's Beach](#) in Half Moon Bay, while improving public access and also providing necessary planning time for eventually relocating the highway away from the surf zone. The Commission worked closely with San Mateo County, Caltrans, and interested stakeholders to design an adaptation plan that worked for everyone.



Similarly, in November the Commission realized the benefits of working closely with the City of San Francisco, SPUR, Surfrider, and other stakeholders over the last several years on an interim authorization of shoreline protection for the Great Highway and critical wastewater infrastructure

at [Ocean Beach](#). Commission staff had previously toured the Ocean Beach site with visiting executive staff from NOAA’s Office of Coastal Management (OCM) to discuss on-going collaborative planning at this location in response to sea level rise and coastal erosion, including grant-funded Commission LCP planning work with the City. State Coastal Conservancy staff and the Policy Director for [SPUR](#) also participated in the discussion, highlighting the work of SPUR in developing the [Ocean Beach Master Plan](#). As in California, coastal resiliency is a major policy focus of the federal government, particularly post Hurricane Sandy, and California’s coastal management program is an important partner in the efforts to build resilient shoreline communities.

**Resiliency and Environmental Justice.** Building resiliency in the face of rising seas also requires difficult decisions about the distribution of environmental costs and benefits along our coast, as illustrated by two major shoreline protection projects approved by the Commission in 2015. In May, the Commission approved a revetment proposed by Santa Barbara County to protect the public park at [Goleta Beach](#). Although no major buildings were immediately in danger, the Commission did agree that parking, utilities, restrooms and other structural amenities that supported this very popular and free public beach park were potentially at risk. Considering the evidence that Goleta Beach may not be actively eroding in the same way that many other beaches are, and with a strong monitoring condition that might trigger the future removal of the

**Resiliency and Environmental Justice: who wins and loses?**



**Goleta Beach, SB County**

- Public Beach Park
- Free Recreational Access



**Broad Beach, LA County**

- 114 private homes
- Initial \$20 million for sand replenishment

revetment, the Commission concluded that protection of this significant public coastal access amenity (1.5 million visitors a year) was appropriate for the time being (authorized for 20 years).

In contrast, in October the Commission approved the revetment at [Broad Beach](#) in Malibu, proposed and paid for by the homeowners to protect their homes along the beach. The Commission first considered this project last December (see summary

[here](#)). In contrast to Goleta Beach, there was no question that the nearly mile-long revetment had already and would continue to cause significant impacts to the public beach and access. The 114 homeowners, therefore, formed a geological hazard abatement district, and committed to pay more than \$30 million to pay for a substantial and periodic beach replenishment effort to rebuild and maintain Broad Beach for the public, while maintaining the revetment to protect their homes. Like Goleta Beach, though, there is considerable uncertainty as to what may happen over the long run at Broad Beach, particularly in light of projected sea level rise. The Commission discussed how to address this uncertainty and the potential future loss of lateral public access in front of the revetment if the sand replenishment doesn’t function as planned. Ultimately the Commission approved the project, but only for 10 years so that it could be revisited and revised if necessary. The State Lands Commission is expected to complete its review of the project’s impacts to public trust resources this year.

**Providing for Sensible Development while Protecting Public Resources.** The Commission continues to use adaptive mechanisms to protect public beach resources and facilitate the long-term relocation of private development and public infrastructure out of harm's way where appropriate. This includes requirements that replacement homes assume the risks of their locations, and record legal restrictions to not rely on existing shoreline armoring in the future. The Commission also continues to work with landowners to locate new homes in the least vulnerable location, and secure commitments to not build future seawalls or other damaging shoreline structures as well as remove the approved development if and when it becomes too dangerous to occupy (for example, the approved [Lundberg](#) residence on Bodega Bay). On the North Coast, the Commission approved the [Big Lagoon LCP Amendment](#) that provided for the planned retreat of 14 existing cabins away from the bluffs that have experienced episodic and massive cliff failures over the last 70 years.

The Commission also strives to balance the need for some redevelopment while not prejudicing future options for managed retreat or facilitating expanded armoring of the shoreline. For example, in addition to regulating redevelopment projects in Solana Beach (for example, [WJK Trust](#)), the Commission is working with the City on LCP rules for regulating the redevelopment of structures along the high bluffs there. The Commission is also working with the City to develop mitigation policies that can be applied to private seawall projects that have adverse impacts on the public recreational and ecological values of the beach.



Maintaining the public recreational beach below the blufftop homes in Solana Beach continues to be a challenge given the proliferation of private seawalls that prevent the natural retreat of the beach, but for now the Cities of Solana Beach and Encinitas are hoping to benefit from a federally-sponsored beach replenishment effort potentially to begin sometime in 2017-18 ([approved](#) by the Commission in 2013).

The Commission also continues to engage with stakeholders, the legislature and other state agencies in order to better prepare for and adapt to climate change. In 2015 the Commission received briefings on Living Shoreline adaptation strategies and tsunami hazards from professors and students at Humboldt State University. The Executive Director and staff participated in various public forums, including a UCSC [Climate and Policy Conference](#) in March, a June hearing of the Assembly's *Select Committee on Coastal Protection* concerning [Sea Level Rise: Resilience and Adaptation in the Coastal Zone](#), and a [workshop](#) titled "Fostering Climate Resilient Coastal Communities" at UC Irvine in July. The workshop was focused on learning how to build resilient coastal communities with communication and

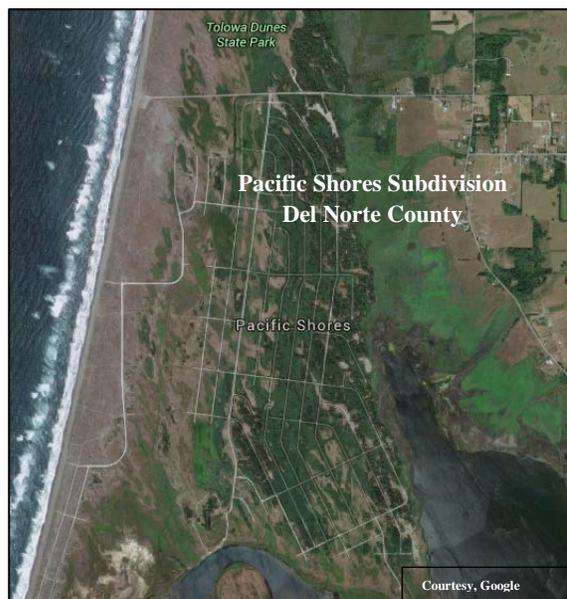
planning tools, funding strategies and resilient coastal design. A video of the Executive Director's keynote address, which provides an overview of the Commission's work on coastal hazards and resiliency, is available [here](#).

## Providing for Environmentally-Sustainable Coastal Development

The Coastal Commission strives to work closely with project applicants and interested stakeholders to assure that new development proposals fully address and protect the environmental values that the Coastal Act establishes as statewide land use priorities. In 2015, the Commission took some major actions to protect resources, ranging from marine mammals to rural coastal agriculture.

The big decision of the year was in October, when the Commission approved [SeaWorld's proposed expansion](#) of the killer whale tanks but with a condition that prohibited the future captive breeding or transfer of SeaWorld's killer whales. Hundreds of citizens from around the country participated in the hearing at the Long Beach Convention Center, which lasted the better part of the day. The Commission has since been sued by SeaWorld for its decision.

The Commission also continued to protect California's coastal wetlands, including along the San Dieguito River, when it [denied](#) a proposal by the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority to delete a prior Commission permit condition that required the relocation of a public access boardwalk and wetland restoration. Subsequently, staff and the applicant were able to reach agreement on a modified boardwalk alignment that met both the Coastal Act requirements to protect and restore wetlands, and the prior permit requirements, while allowing for public access along the edge of the restored wetlands – a great outcome.



In January the Commission [approved](#) the restoration and enhancement of 26 acres of wetland, dune, and prairie habitats in the Pacific Shores subdivision and around Lake Earl in Del Norte County. The project was proposed as mitigation for the Commission's [2013 approval](#) of the expansion of the Crescent City airport -- an important economic resource for the region -- which resulted in the fill of wetlands.

Later in the year, the Commission approved a comprehensive dredging and [eel grass management plan](#) for Newport Bay that provided for streamlined maintenance around boating facilities while protecting the sensitive eel grass. The approval was the culmination of close coordination between Commission staff, the City of Newport Beach, the California Fish and Wildlife Department and NOAA Fisheries to develop a strong but practical eel grass mitigation program.

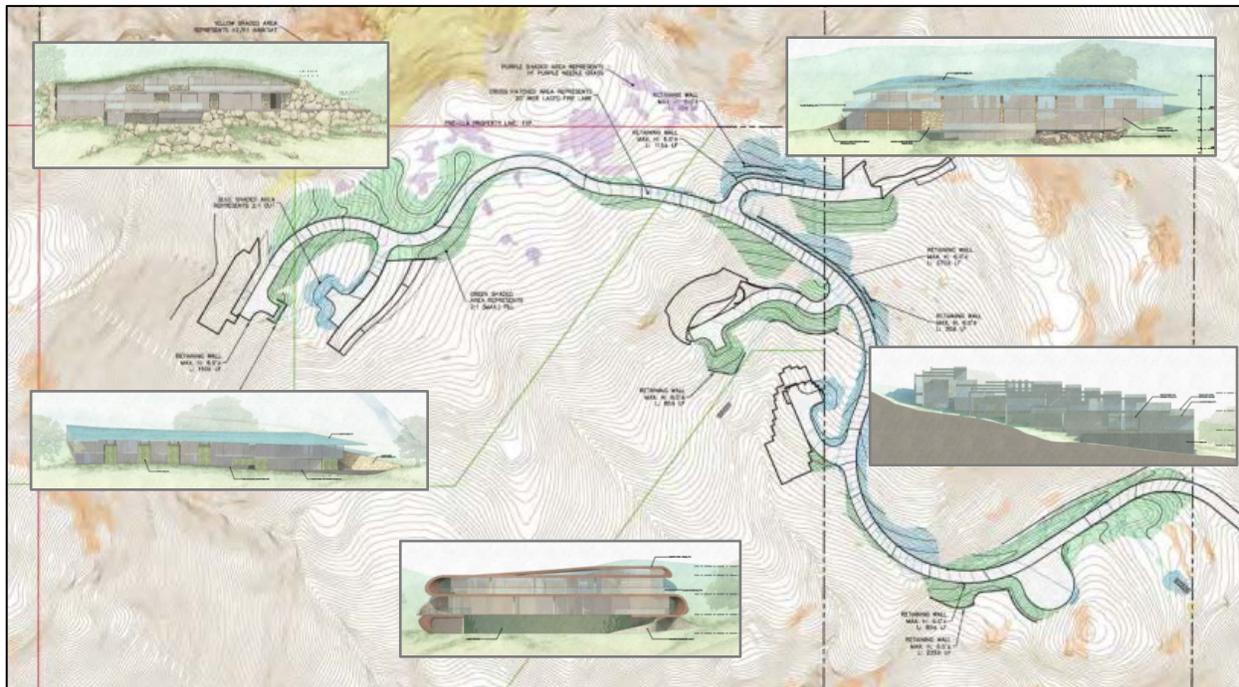
**Protecting Unique Community Character.** The Commission continues to struggle with a resource of another sort – the community character of Venice in the City of Los Angeles. Venice is one of the places along the coast that has yet to complete its LCP. If completed by the City, the LCP would help to establish clear standards for protecting the built environment of the community and enable the City of LA to take the lead role in the coastal permitting process after nearly 40 years. Almost every month last year the Commission heard about development issues in Venice, including the on-going challenge of protecting affordable housing in this quickly redeveloping and gentrifying community. Although the Commission no longer has any authority over affordable housing (it was removed from the Coastal Act in 1981), many community members continue to press for its protection through the Coastal Act requirement to protect community character. Notably, the Commission has previously recognized that the “unique social ... diversity of Venice” is part of its community character that should be protected. The Commission will continue to grapple with this issue in 2016, as it has many pending appeals of local development decisions; it is also working closely with the City to get the LCP for Venice finally completed. The City of LA has received two grants totaling \$350,000 from the Commission to work on the LCP.

**Commission Tour of Venice in January, 2015**



**Protecting and Providing Water for Communities.** Sustainable water supplies remained front and center with the Commission in 2015, and will continue to do so, even as El Nino storms bring more rain to drought-stricken California. In February, the Commission fast-tracked the [approval](#) of the recommissioning of the intakes for the City of Santa Barbara’s previously-approved desalination plant, hearing it within one month of the application filing. In another action to address the drought and groundwater protection, the Commission [denied](#) the Cisar application for a private well to support residential landscaping in Monterey County because of its potential impacts on groundwater and natural resources. The local decision approving the well had been appealed by the local water purveyor in the area. Finally, in October, the Commission approved an amendment to the monitoring program for the [Cal-Am desalination test well](#) in Monterey County, to allow the testing to continue while assuring protection of nearby agricultural wells. Related to the proposed Huntington Beach Poseidon desalination plant, the independent scientific and technical review [panel](#) concluded looking at the feasibility of various intake designs to assure protection of marine resources and consistency with state policy on open water intakes. The Commission anticipates a hearing on this proposed desalination project in 2016.

**Protecting the Santa Monica Mountains.** 2015 came to a close with Commission action in December on the [Sweetwater Mesa applications](#) (aka “the Edge”) for five homes in the Santa Monica Mountains above Malibu. Previously denied by the Commission in 2011 with direction



**Sweetwater Mesa Residential Subdivision and Homes in Santa Monica Mountains**

to consolidate the project’s large disturbance footprint, the Commission reconsidered the application pursuant to a settlement of the litigation that had been filed in 2011. In the intervening time, the County’s LCP had been certified (2014), and in May 2015, the Commission heard a staff recommendation for approval and continued the item with direction to staff to request additional analyses of alternatives in order to ensure that the proposed project was as compliant with the LCP as possible. Commission staff worked with the applicant to identify alternative project footprints that would further reduce impacts to sensitive habitat resources and scenic views, while addressing the siting and design of the homes in this area prone to landslides and fire hazards. The final approval resulted in a total development footprint of 18 acres with 140 acres in protected open space. A public trail dedication was also made and required as part of the project approval. The Sierra Club recently sued the Commission over its decision.

**Enforcing the Resource Policies of the Coastal Act.** Finally, the Commission’s Enforcement Program continued to play a large role in the protection of coastal resources. In addition to the early success implementing its new administrative penalty authority to protect public access (see above), the Commission heard enforcement orders in four cases in 2015 that addressed illegal development in sensitive coastal habitats and wetlands. These orders directed the removal of development, restoration of the sensitive areas, and in some cases, included significant penalties that go into the Violation Remediation Account (VRA). Reflecting a commitment to attempting to work out cases with alleged violators whenever possible, and an emphasis on avoiding litigation costs and delays whenever possible, all of the orders heard in 2015 were consent matters – that is, settlements reached between Commission staff and the violators.

In the [Segal](#) case, for example, the Commission ordered the removal of illegal development, merger of two illegally subdivided lots, and the restoration of sensitive habitat on the property, which is in the Santa Monica Mountains ecosystem. The area provides important riparian, oak woodland, and chaparral habitat for native species. As recognized by the Commission and the County of Los Angeles LCP, the Santa Monica Mountains ecosystem comprises substantial environmentally sensitive habitat (ESHA) because it is rare and especially valuable due to its special nature as the largest, most pristine, physically complex, and biologically diverse example of a mediterranean climate ecosystem in coastal southern California. Other cases in 2015 that protected environmentally sensitive habitats include [Conan-Hayes](#), [Newport Banning Ranch](#), and [Front Runner LLC](#).

**Other Notable Commission Actions.** Other actions protecting resources in 2015 included:

- [Humboldt State University Corporation Yard Appeal](#) (approved with redesign to minimize wetland impacts and restore 1.3 acres of wetland at Humboldt Bay).
- [McGregor Residence Appeal](#) (approved with redesign to protect a 16-acre agricultural parcel and scenic views in rural San Mateo County).
- [San Francisco PUC Soil Remediation](#) (approved with conditions to protect and mitigate impacts to wetlands, habitat, water quality and cultural resources).
- [City of Carlsbad LCP Amendment](#) (Car Country) (approved with modifications to protect scenic highway corridor and community character in San Diego County).
- [Longhi Artist Work/Live Development Appeal](#) (approved 30-unit facility with conditions to protect and restore riparian habitat).
- [Marina Del Rey Boat Central Project](#) (approved 345-space dry stack boat storage facility with public access promenade and marine habitat and water quality protection measures).
- [Black Hill Villas Appeal](#) (approved 17-lot residential subdivision redesigned to protect sensitive riparian and raptor habitat and visual resources).
- [SF Rec and Parks Sharp Park Golf Course Flood Control](#) (approved to maintain public recreation with conditions to protect red legged frog and wetland habitat).
- Upgrade and expansion of the [Redondo Beach Energy Project](#) (review of power plant with recommendations to protect wetlands and address coastal hazards)
- [Grandview Lot Consolidation and Residences](#) (Denial of two proposed homes in Venice to protect community character).
- [Laguna Beach Fuel Modification project appeal](#) (No issue found with LCP compliance concerning hazard management and protection of sensitive habitat (local action upheld)).
- [Integral Communities](#) (approval of demolition of 124-unit RV Park, and 193 new residential units with conditions to address public access, wetlands, views, and hazards).
- [SONGS Mitigation Program](#) (Approval of two year work program and budget for San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS) Mitigation Monitoring Program).
- [Caltrans Carpinteria LCP Amendment](#) (approval of interchange, HOV lanes and bike path with modifications to protect access, wetlands, water quality and agriculture).
- [SCE Dry Cask Storage](#) at San Onofre (approval of spent nuclear fuel storage facility with conditions to address coastal hazards and potential future managed retreat).

## Public Engagement: Social Media, Data, Outreach and Stewardship

The Commission continued to push forward on public engagement objectives in its Strategic Plan in 2015, having more than 80% of its plan objectives completed or underway by the Year 2 [Update](#) on Plan implementation. The year began with the successful launching of the Commission's Spanish language [agenda](#), to improve the accessibility of the coastal program to the public.

Also of special note, the Commission created a new Public Information Officer position and hired Noaki Schwartz to take the lead on media relations for the coastal program. Shortly after Noaki's arrival, the Commission stepped into the world of social media, launching a new [Facebook](#) page and an [Instagram](#) account.

The Facebook page conveys information about California's coast and coastal program, educates the interested public about coastal management and current issues, and communicates



more broadly about the work of the Commission. This new page joins the [Commission's Public Education page](#), which has been on Facebook for many years focusing more generally on coastal and ocean related topics, stewardship activities, and ways to get involved in coastal protection.

The Commission was also thrilled that its [Protect Our Coast and Oceans Fund](#) surpassed the minimum requirement of raising at least \$250,000 in donations in order for it to stay on the State personal income tax form next year as a "check box" under the Charitable Contributions section. As of December 2015, the fund had raised \$279,771 from 24,625 taxpayers throughout



California. The Coastal Commission is grateful to all the individuals who donated to the fund, which provides grants to clean our shorelines, restore habitat, bring underserved kids to the coast, promote access to the coast, and invest in the long term health of California's coast and ocean. Every year the Commission receives many more applications for grant funding than it can support. Some highlights of last year's grants, most of which support outreach to underserved communities and youth, are summarized below.

## Examples of Coastal Commission 2015 Whale Tail Grants

- **Kids' Adopt-A-Beach School Assembly Program and Beach Cleanup Program** (\$100,000). This statewide program will educate approximately 7,000 students at underserved elementary schools about the harmful effects of ocean pollution, and will host beach cleanup events around World Oceans Day.
- **ExplorOcean for the "H2O SOS" program** (\$20,000). Underserved middle and high school students will learn about different threats to the ocean, pick one to research, and then present a public awareness campaigns to address the threat.
- **Lawndale High School for the Marine Biology Exposure Project** (\$10,000). Teens in the school's Marine Science Academy will conduct different ocean science studies during on-the-water boat trips. Afterward, they will prepare and deliver lessons to youth at nearby middle schools.
- **STAR, Inc. for "Get Your Green On - Animal Style"** (\$10,000). 664 students from underserved, urban schools in Los Angeles will participate in eight hands-on environmental education lessons, which will also feature live rescued animals and information to share with their parents.
- **Parkview Elementary School for the "Ocean Ambassadors" project** (\$9,992). Fourth-grade students (many of whom are children of farmworkers) will take a series of field trips including tide pool studies on Anacapa Island, water quality testing on the Ventura River, and learning about wetlands and watershed protection at Ormond Beach.
- **Central Coast Aquarium in Avila Beach for the Marine Life Monitoring Program** (\$14,912). At least 400 students in grades 4-12 at underserved schools in nearby counties will observe and identify marine life on the open bay, rocky shore, and sandy beach. They will also share their data and learn about water quality and ocean stewardship.
- **O'Neill Sea Odyssey for transportation for Sea Odyssey students** (\$9,800). Underserved students will receive bus transportation to attend the O'Neill Sea Odyssey program, an environmental stewardship program taking place aboard a 65-foot catamaran and at an educational center on land.
- **Bay Institute for shoreline cleanups on the east side of San Francisco** (\$30,000). Aquarium of the Bay staff will lead year-round volunteer shoreline cleanups on San Francisco's east side and share a marine debris public education program with participants, including volunteers recruited from Bayview Hunters Point.
- **KIDS for the BAY/Earth Island Institute for the Watershed Action – Coastal Connections Program** (\$32,000). Elementary students at urban schools in Oakland and Richmond will be able to take educational coastal field trips as part of their environmental education lessons focusing on local creeks, the San Francisco Bay, and pollution prevention.
- **Fort Ross Conservancy for a marine ecology program** (\$9,740). Underserved students from Sonoma and Mendocino counties (including youth from the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians), as well as elsewhere in the San Francisco Bay Area, will come to Fort Ross to learn about marine ecology and stewardship.
- **Tolowa Dunes Stewards (TDS)/Friends of the Dunes for habitat restoration and education** (\$20,000). TDS will work with Del Norte County youth, with an emphasis on tribal youth, to help them care for the Tolowa Coast through habitat restoration. TDS will also educate the youth and their families about conservation careers and stewardship opportunities.

The Commission also continues to engage the public through Coastal Cleanup Day. September 19<sup>th</sup> was the [31<sup>st</sup> annual cleanup](#), and more than 68,000 volunteers removed 1,142,997 pounds of trash and recyclable material from California's coast and inland waterways. Staff focused efforts on inland locations this year in an effort to reach out to underserved communities and to remove debris from waterways in anticipation of El Nino. As a result, Coastal Cleanup Day actually had more inland cleanup locations than coastal sites, and this past event had the largest geographic reach that the Cleanup has ever achieved. The organizing effort was streamlined this year thanks to a new Coastal Cleanup Day site map produced with the help of the Commission's IT Department. Based on the Commission's new [Your Coast](#) map (see above), the [Cleanup map](#) allowed volunteers to easily find their preferred cleanup location and register directly with the local organizers. The map will be a fantastic tool for the Commission for years to come.

Finally, the Commission continued to make great progress developing and implementing its Coastal Data Management System (CDMS). Staff completed an effort to provide more than 20 years of Commission meeting materials on the web from November, 1995 to the present. This included scanning and linking more than 8,900 staff reports to the Commission's on-line archive of meeting agendas. The creation of an on-line archive of final adopted findings of Commission

actions is under development as a component of the future public interface for the Commission's Coastal Data Management System (see briefing on the [CDMS](#)). In the meantime, this valuable resource may be found on the Commission's website [here](#). The Commission also began posting [local permit actions](#) that are appealable to the Commission, to facilitate public participation and effective citizen oversight in the coastal management program.



## Other Notable Commission Briefings, Events and Activities

The Commission received additional information and reports in 2015 on a variety of important coastal management concerns, including:

- [A Year 2 Strategic Plan Implementation Report](#)
- 2015 Budget Briefings and Reports in [February](#), [March](#), [May](#), [June](#), and [July](#)
- An Update on [Agency Workforce Diversity](#) (p. 27)
- A briefing on the Drought from Under Secretary of Natural Resources/Commissioner Janelle Beland
- A briefing on [Affordable Housing and the Coastal Act](#) (p. 20)
- A briefing on the [Coastal Permit Appeals Process](#) (p. 2)
- A briefing on the Refugio oil spill in Santa Barbara County
- Briefings on El Nino and Coastal Storm Hazards in [November](#) and December
- A Report on the [Updated Coastal Zone Management Enhancement Strategy](#)
- An Update on on-going [Lower-Cost Overnight Accommodations](#) staff work (p. 10)
- The Annual Report of the [Open Space and Conservation Program](#)
- The Annual Report of the [Public Education Program](#)

All of the Commission's actions and any related reports may be viewed at the Commission's [website](#). A video archive of each entire meeting is also available at the [Cal-Span](#) website.

## Challenges Ahead in 2016

This 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Coastal Act will bring new challenges to the Commission in its mission to protect the coast for all Californians. In March the Commission is scheduled to hear the proposal to develop the 401-acre Newport Banning Ranch site with 899 residences and commercial visitor-serving development. In April, the Commission is planning to hear a State Parks' plan to implement a new parking fee program in Sonoma County. And the Poseidon proposal to construct a new desalination plant at Huntington Beach will likely come forward in the first half of the year also. Information about upcoming matters may be found on the Commission's [Future Agenda items](#) link.

Other pressing issues will continue to unfold. The question of public access at Martin's Beach remains unresolved (see background discussion [here](#), p.6). The Commission is actively investigating the Cemex sand mining operation in Marina. And new land use challenges for coastal communities are being raised by the growing popularity of Airbnb and other similar overnight rental activities.

Most important, perhaps, the Commission will begin to see significant progress and submittal of new LCP updates and amendments as a result of the on-going LCP grant program. There are currently 169 LCP amendments in progress either with the Commission or with local governments. The Commission's sea level rise team and district planning staff will be working closely with local planning staff to address rising tides, coastal hazards and adaptation planning as we seek to build and maintain resilient coastal communities in California.

Organizationally, the Commission will continue to face the challenges of succession planning, staff retention, and professional development, as increasing numbers of baby boomers retire from the agency. Fortunately, the current administration has been very supportive of the Commission's efforts to take on LCP planning and climate change statewide, and the increase to the baseline budget, if sustained, will help the Commission handle staff successions. The Commission also continues to have a strong and supportive public that engages in and helps to drive its programmatic mission of protecting coastal resources of statewide significance.

The work of managing California's coast is an on-going mission. And while much progress has been made on achieving the goals of the Coastal Act over the last 40 years, much remains to be accomplished. This was perhaps no more clear than in a 2015 legislative [hearing](#) on "expanding access to the coast for underserved communities." Panelists highlighted not just the need to provide public access to and along the immediate shoreline, but also the need for affordable and easy ways to get to the coast in the first place, as well as the basic social justice and economic concerns that affect the capacity of citizens to simply find the time to enjoy the coast.

Our important work will continue, despite the challenges, and 2016 should be another exciting year for the California coast.