

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

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



March 24, 2020

To: Agencies and Local Governments with Jurisdiction in the Coastal Zone

From: John Ainsworth, Executive Director

Re: Coastal Access Restrictions and Closures Due to COVID-19

Because unified efforts among federal, state, local, and tribal governments are necessary to ensure that people are doing everything possible to limit the spread of COVID-19, the Coastal Commission is taking additional measures to help maintain public welfare during this crisis. Limiting exposure by avoiding contact with other people, and obeying statewide and local shelter-in-place orders is critical. This includes “social distancing,” which entails staying at least 6 feet from other people, using masks and gloves as needed, and not participating in group activities.

It has become clear in recent days that many Californians are not adequately practicing social distancing directives, especially in public spaces, such as coastal parks and beaches. Accordingly, many public agencies and local governments have inquired about coastal permitting requirements associated with limiting such access in the coastal zone. The Coastal Act allows the Executive Director to waive emergency coastal permit requirements for public agencies that are performing a public service to protect life and property in cases of emergency. (Pub. Res. Code section 30611).

Under this provision, the Executive Director may exercise his discretion to waive, upon request, emergency coastal permitting requirements for public agencies responsible for maintaining public parks, beaches, parking lots, and other coastal accessways if applicable federal, state, or local health departments have deemed it necessary to restrict access to or close those public spaces in order to protect public health and safety during this health emergency. Given the recent events, the Executive Director is prepared to waive permitting requirements for restrictions or closures where the restriction or closure is not longer than the duration of the applicable shelter-in-place order, it is the minimum action necessary to protect public health and safety, and it does not involve the erection of any permanent structures (Please see attached sample notification letter). Any such waivers will expire automatically when applicable shelter-in-place orders are lifted.

At the same time, and because recreational beach and coastal access also play important roles in maintaining mental and emotional health, especially during times of stress, public agencies and local governments should strongly consider maintaining access to such public spaces where recreational users are practicing safe social distancing and there is no obvious increased risk to public health, or if other measures are deemed sufficient in a given area. We recognize there is an inequity in coastal access and we strongly encourage local governments to consider approaches that balance public health order requirements and equitable public access -- the coast belongs to all.

Please contact your local Coastal Commission district office if you have any questions.