



CALIFORNIA
COASTAL
COMMISSION

Environmental Justice

What is the Coastal Commission?

The Coastal Commission was created by a citizen initiative passed by the voters in 1972. Californians were so concerned about pollution, habitat destruction and loss of public access along the coast that they passed a law to protect it. The Commission is a state agency charged with preserving and protecting California's coast and ocean, and does this by regulating new development along 1,271 miles of coastline. We have monthly meetings where our 12-member board of Commissioners vote on development proposals that are evaluated by our staff of scientists, planners and attorneys.

Background on AB 2616

In 2016, the California Coastal Commission worked hard to pass an important amendment to the Coastal Act, AB 2616, giving the agency new authority to specifically consider environmental justice when making permit decisions. This legislation also cross-references existing non-discrimination and civil rights law in the government code and requires the Governor to appoint an Environmental Justice Commissioner to our board.

Why are we developing an Environmental Justice policy?

The Commission is developing an environmental justice policy to guide how agency staff can implement the new authority under AB 2616 and to help the Commission make even better, stronger decisions that protect coastal resources in ways that also benefit underserved communities.

Why are we seeking your input? Why is this important for your community?

Your participation is critical and will ensure that the issues, places and projects you care about get the attention they deserve. We want to hear from you about what coastal issues matter to you, and how we can address those concerns. It's critical our new environmental justice policies reflect your priorities and address the relevant needs of your communities. We want to do all we can to make sure that every one has equal access to the benefits of coastal protection.

Project Examples

Public Access

Jonathan Club - This case showed how the public access policies of the Coastal Act can be used to end discrimination on public land. In the 1980s, the exclusive Jonathan Club wanted to expand its private, white, men-only clubhouse on Santa Monica Beach in Los Angeles. The club sat on land it leased from the city and state. When the owners applied for a permit, the Commission said the club could only expand if they dropped their discriminatory membership practices. They refused, and sued the Commission. The lawsuit went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court where the Commission prevailed. The Jonathan Club is still private, but now accepts all races, genders and faiths.

Malibu - In 2014, the Commission gained the ability to fine people who block public access. In December 2016, the Commissioners fined an oceanfront homeowner in Malibu over \$4 million dollars for blocking a public path to Las Flores Beach for over a decade. Only those who were willing to rent the house for \$1,000 a night could have exclusive use of what should have been a public beach. We're currently fighting this case in court.

Sea Level Rise

Loss of public beaches - Sea level rise is going to threaten public beaches because higher water levels mean more erosion. Many homeowners will continue to push for more sea walls to protect their homes and this will also eat away at beaches. This will disproportionately impact people who can't afford to live near the beach.

Energy, Public Works and Critical Infrastructure

Puente Power Plant - Puente was a proposal for a gas fired power plant at Mandalay Beach in Oxnard. The Commission didn't have direct authority over this project, but the Commission sent a letter to the California Energy Commission pointing out how this project could harm an already overburdened community. The project is currently on hold at the Energy Commission at the request of the applicant.

Phillips 66 rail spur - The Phillips 66 oil company wanted to build a rail spur in San Luis Obispo County to allow freight trains to deliver millions of gallons of crude oil every week through dozens of densely populated urban areas to the north. Opponents worried about the trains possibly derailing and the potential health impacts and fought the project to a standstill. The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors denied the project. However, if the project had come before the Commissioners, they could have considered any environmental justice impacts when making a decision on the permit.

Federal Consistency

U.S./Mexico Border Wall - The Commission will need to review President Trump's proposal to build a wall along the U.S./Mexico border. In September 2017, Attorney General Becerra sued the federal government over the wall on behalf of the state and the Coastal Commission, based partially on how it would damage plants and wildlife.

Air Quality

Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area - This 3,600-acre area is popular with off-roaders but is also home to sensitive plants and animals. Downwind residents have complained about air quality and health problems from the dust blowing off the sand dunes. While the Commission has reviewed the operating permit several times, it has never had the authority to consider the environmental justice aspects of the program until now. The Commission can now consider the environmental justice impacts of air quality and health problems caused by off-roading in the state park.