

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

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



# F5

**DATE:** December 14, 2018

**TO:** Coastal Commission and Interested Parties

**FROM:** John Ainsworth, Executive Director  
Sarah Christie, Legislative Director  
Linda Locklin, Public Access Manager

**SUBJECT:** **Informational briefing on the 1982 Hollister Ranch Public Access Program**  
**No action will be taken by the California Coastal Commission**

---

## Hollister Ranch Access Program Overview

### **Background**

Hollister Ranch is a 14,000-acre, gated subdivision in Santa Barbara County with 8.5 miles of spectacular coastline. It was subdivided in 1971, a year prior to the passage of Proposition 20, the predecessor to the Coastal Act. Subsequently, development on the property was subject to Proposition 20 or, after January 1, 1977, the Coastal Act.

Adjacent (west) to the Ranch is the privately owned 24,000-acre Cojo Jalama Ranch, and then Vandenberg Air Force Base. These three properties constitute the least accessible stretch of California's coastline, with less than 2 miles of general public access in a 60-mile stretch.

In the late 1970s, the Coastal Commission attempted to obtain public access to the Hollister Ranch coast through the then-traditional regulatory process of requiring individual property owners to provide beach access as a condition of their coastal development permits. Unfortunately, this effort was met with strong opposition and multiple lawsuits by property owners. The impasse threatened to drag on for years, at significant expense to the state, with lengthy delays for both private development and public access.

To resolve the disputes between property owners and the Commission, the Legislature enacted AB 643 (Calvo, Ch. 919, Stats. of 1979) which added [Public Resources Code Section 30610.3](#) to the Coastal Act. This section allows the Coastal Commission to designate coastal subdivisions with inadequate public access as eligible for an alternative process for meeting the Coastal Act's public access mandate, wherein acquisition is funded through the imposition of in-lieu fees. Once an area is designated as eligible, the Commission develops a coastal access program that will ensure meaningful public access. The Coastal Conservancy implements the program through a management plan.

## F 5 - Informational briefing on the 1982 Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program

In January 1980, the Commission designated the Hollister Ranch as eligible for the 30610.3 program.<sup>1</sup> After a thorough public process, in August, 1981, the Coastal Commission adopted the Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program. It provided for pedestrian, bicycle and shuttle van access over existing roads and proposed new hiking trails. The program called for environmental camp sites, rangers, and public facilities, including bathrooms, showers and picnic areas. All of the proposed public amenities and improvements relied on the State Coastal Conservancy's ability to purchase public access easements over portions of the property owned by the Hollister Ranch Owners Association. Therefore, the 1981/82 Budget Act included a \$500,000 appropriation to begin that process. (Item 2.00J).

When the Commission adopted the Coastal Access Program, it acknowledged that changes might be required to reflect recommendations in an environmental assessment, which was in progress at that time. In May 1982, the completed [Environmental Assessment](#) was reviewed and approved by the Commission. The Commission then directed staff to revise the Coastal Access Program in response to the report's recommendations as well as per discussions with the Hollister Ranch owners and the Coastal Conservancy staff. In August, 1982, the Commission approved the [amended Program](#). The revisions eliminated the camp sites and rangers, limited all pedestrian and bicycle access to the existing roads and right of way, and instituted daily limits on the number of visitors. The program would be implemented in three phases, with visitorship gradually increasing from 100 to 500 persons per day. In short, the changes struck a balance between private property rights, residential privacy, public access, public safety, and resource conservation.

The State Coastal Conservancy and the Commission attempted to implement the revised program immediately, but were still unable to overcome staunch landowner opposition and gain access to the property. Without the necessary appraisal data, the Conservancy had no way to determine the cost of acquiring the necessary public access easements. Without knowing the costs, staff could not calculate the value of the in-lieu fees necessary to fund the acquisition of the land interests necessary to carry out the program. The agencies were unable to move forward.

Recognizing that access could be delayed indefinitely if the landowners did not cooperate in the appraisal process, the Legislature stepped in again, passing Assembly Bill 321 (Hannigan, Ch. 42, Stats. of 1982), which added [Section 30610.8](#) to the Public Resources Code. The bill fixed the in-lieu fee at Hollister at \$5,000 for each permit, directed the Conservancy and the Public Works Board to proceed "as expeditiously as possible" to obtain access "in a timely manner," and specified that the fees are to go toward purchasing the necessary public access easements.

Later that year, the Public Works Board requested that the Attorney General obtain a court order for both agencies to enter the gated subdivision. The request was granted, but the 1982 election of Governor George Deukmejian, who was openly opposed to the Coastal Commission and its mandate, had changed the political dynamic around public access, and the program was shelved. Over time, it sank into obscurity.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 1981 Access Program document states that the designation occurred in September 1980; however, meeting minutes from the time indicate that the designation actually occurred in January 1980.

## F5 - Informational briefing on the 1982 Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program

In 2017, an unrelated lawsuit and settlement negotiations over an earlier-required public access easement on a parcel in Hollister Ranch, obtained pursuant to a CDP issued to the YMCA, sparked a wave of renewed public support for providing public access to the Hollister Ranch coastline. It also refocused attention on the long-forgotten Access Program. This interest culminated in a bill, AB 2534 (Limón), which would have taken critical steps toward finally implementing the coastal access program that the Commission adopted over 35 years ago.

AB 2534 would have created two new subaccounts to support public access at Hollister Ranch. Funds deposited into the Hollister Ranch Subaccount within the Kapiloff Land Bank Account could be used for purposes of acquisition. The bill authorized the State Lands Commission to transfer up to \$1 million from the Kapiloff Land Bank Account into the sub account. The Hollister Access Management Account within the State Coastal Conservancy Fund would have held the in-lieu fees, as well as other sources of funding, for the purpose of providing the necessary capital improvements and ongoing management at Hollister. The bill also directed all relevant state agencies to work together using their existing authorities to provide timely public access through the subdivision to its coastline. Finally, the bill clarified existing law to specify that the \$5,000 in-lieu fee applied to every coastal development permit, not just one permit per property. The County of Santa Barbara also subsequently amended its Local Coastal Program to clarify that the in-lieu fee applies to every permit. While the bill was vetoed by Governor Brown, his veto message indicated that the access program should be updated before creating new funding mechanisms.

The 1982 Coastal Access Program remains the guiding blueprint for public access at Hollister Ranch. Although it is a comprehensive and legally valid document that could be implemented with no changes, further revisions may be warranted. The elements of the existing program are as follows:

### 1982 Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program Components

#### **Coastal Access:**

- Pedestrian trail parallel to Rancho Real Rd., vertical access along 6 existing beach access roads
- Bicycle path along Rancho Real Rd., vertical access along 6 existing beach access roads
- Shuttle bus service via 15-passenger van(s) from Gaviota State Park to beach use areas
- Environmental education programs, managed by public agency or non-profit organization, in conjunction with State Coastal Conservancy
- Lateral access easement along entire coast, from mean high tide line to toe of slope/revetment

#### **Facilities:**

- Staging area at Gaviota State Park, including parking for 100+ cars, transit shelter, bathroom and information kiosk
- Up to 6 beach recreation areas to include restrooms, showers, drinking water, trash containers, signs (including warning signs for tides and sensitive resources)
- Security guards

**Restrictions:**

- Access hours 6 a.m./sunrise (whichever is earlier) to 9 p.m.
- Daily visitor limit of 100-500 persons, per phased implementation plan
- Pedestrian/bicycle access limited to 10-20% of daily visitor limit
- Access permit required, by advance reservation or at staging area
- Managing entity can adjust hours and/or daily visitor limit based on monitoring and environmental conditions, with approval of Commission and Conservancy

**Phased Implementation, subject to environmental monitoring:**

- Phase I – 2 years
  - Public access to 2 beaches: St. Augustin and Sacate (YMCA)
  - Visitors limited to 100/day in year 1, up to 200/day in year 2
- Phase II – 2 years
  - Public access to 4 beaches, (add Bulito, Drakes)
  - Visitors limited to 300/day in year 3, 400/day in year 4
- Phase III – 1+ years
  - Year 5, Public access to 4 beaches: (St. Augustin, Secate, Bulito, Drakes)
  - 2 additional beaches open to educational groups (Alegria, Agua Caliente)
  - Year 6 and beyond, public access to all 6 beaches
  - Visitors up to 500/day total
  - No more than 50 visitors/day at Alegria, Agua Caliente

**Next Steps**

In 2019, the Commission will work with sister agencies and the public to solicit input on potential changes to the program. An inter-agency working group (Coastal Commission, Coastal Conservancy, State Parks, State Lands Commission) will assess constraints, determine what additional information is necessary to inform the update, establish a timeline, and coordinate complimentary roles and responsibilities.

The Commission would like to hold a local public workshop in March to facilitate a community discussion about access needs, opportunities and preferences. Staff will provide regular updates to the Commission and the public at monthly meetings, and post any new information on the website.

The Coastal Commission’s website has already been updated to invite public comment under the “[Highlights](#)” section on the home page. It also provides links to the [1982 Program](#), the [environmental assessment](#), and a map of the area.

###