

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

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## Coastal Commission Selects New Executive Director

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Executive director search timeline: <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/events/ed-search>

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. \_ The Coastal Commission has unanimously selected Jack Ainsworth as its newest executive director to lead the agency in its continuing mission to protect and enhance the California coast for current and future generations.

Ainsworth is the commission's fifth executive director in four decades and will lead a current staff of 156 people at six offices from Arcata to San Diego. Ainsworth, 59, has worked at the commission for 29 years, most recently as the agency's acting executive director.

"While all the candidates were extremely well-qualified, Jack's depth of understanding of coastal issues, the challenges confronting this agency and his steady leadership over the last year thoroughly impressed us," said Chair Dayna Bochco. "We are all looking forward to continuing our work together to protect California's magnificent coastline and ensure access for all."

In 2016, the commission hired CPS HR Consulting to conduct an executive search for a new director. The company embarked on an extensive recruitment effort, contacting more than 1,000 individuals nationwide. The top finalists were interviewed on Friday during a marathon nine hour period.

"I am honored and humbled by this decision, and the fact that the commissioners have entrusted me to lead the next chapter of California's extraordinary coastal legacy," Ainsworth said. "I want the people of California to know that I will do my best every day to protect the coast for everyone, as will all the staff I work with and have so much respect for. It's an honor to serve with such an exceptional staff and dedicated group of commissioners."

Ainsworth grew up in San Bernardino, the middle of nine children. Both his parents were public servants as were all his siblings. He received his BA in environmental studies and geography from California State University, San Bernardino and his MSc in geography from University of California, Riverside.

The position is based in San Francisco with a salary of \$165,432 a year. Ainsworth will begin immediately.

The Coastal Commission was created in 1972 by voter initiative and affirmed four years later by the legislature with the passage of the California Coastal Act. The 12-member commission is tasked with protecting coastal resources, including maximizing public access and recreation, protecting wetlands, habitats, and scenic rural areas.

The agency also provides for coastal agriculture and other coastal-related activities, such as fishing, boating, and aquaculture. The commission does this through careful planning and regulation of development with local governments along the state's coastline.

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**California Coastal Commission**  
**Statement of Qualifications for Executive Director**  
**John (Jack) Ainsworth**

I was born and raised in San Bernardino, California. I am the middle child of nine children. Both of my parents were public servants who taught us that public service was a noble and honorable profession and service to others was an obligation and responsibility we all must embrace. These lessons must have stuck because all of my siblings are or have been public servants. So I guess you can say public service is in my DNA. Growing up money was tight in my family but thankfully in those days attending the local State colleges and universities was affordable for college students working their way through school. I graduated from California State University San Bernardino with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography and Environmental Studies in 1981. In 1986 I received a Master of Science degree in Geography from the University of California Riverside. These degrees included course work in a wide variety of multidisciplinary fields that has provided me with the necessary skills and foundation to understand and critically analyze the difficult and complex array of policy, planning, environmental, legal and technical issues the commission staff must deal with on a daily basis.

My love for the coast and ocean began as a child from day and overnight visits to the beach with my family. The sights, sounds and smells of the ocean were burned into my soul at a young age. For the past 28 years it has been my honor and privilege to serve the Coastal Commission in its mission to implement the Coastal Act to protect our precious coastal resources and public access to the coast. I have never forgotten that the Coastal Commission is protecting and preserving our coastal resources and public access not only for those who have the privilege to live at the coast but for those inland California residents and all people who visit and rely on our coast for recreation and renewal of their spirit.

The first sixteen years of my career with the Commission included working as a coastal program analyst and supervising coastal program analyst in the Commission's South Coast and South Central district offices. This experience provided me with an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Commission's core work relating to the processing and analysis of complex and controversial coastal development permit applications, appeals of local coastal development permits, local coastal programs (LCPs), public works plans, port master plans, university long range development plans, enforcement actions, and other planning and regulatory work. Through this work I obtained a keen understanding of the Coastal Act, Commission regulations, and the complex planning, regulatory, legal and policy issues facing the Commission.

For the past eleven years I have served the Commission as a District Deputy Director, Senior Deputy Director, and since March of 2016 as Acting Executive Director. As the Deputy Director and Senior Deputy Director for the South Central and South Coast District offices, which are two of the busiest and most challenging district offices in the state, I was responsible for the overall administration and management of these offices. I personally know the difficult challenges commission staff face on a day to day basis and the stress of dealing with conflict and controversy on matters that involve a variety of difficult policy, planning, legal and regulatory issues. I am also proud to say that even under a heavy and demanding workload we continued the Commission's long tradition and commitment to maximum public participation in our process involving stakeholders with many diverse perspectives. In my capacity as Senior Deputy I was also responsible for the management of the Commission's statewide planning unit and access program. These units provide support, information, and guidance to the Commission's district offices and local governments on

*John Ainsworth*  
*Qualifications Statement*

policy, regulatory, planning, and access issues. The statewide planning unit also ensures statewide consistency on the application and implementation of planning and regulatory policy through coastal development permits and LCP planning.

I have found that to achieve success under challenging circumstances requires a management philosophy and agency culture of mutual support and teamwork among all levels of staff; open and effective communication between management and staff; providing staff with clear direction on agency priorities; ability to make timely decisions; realistic expectations of staff capacity; effective feedback loops/systems to critically examine and deal with problems and inefficiencies when they arise; ability to serve the public in a timely, efficient and respectful manner; and provide a comfortable and pleasant working environment for staff that includes a good dose of humor infused into our daily work.

In my role as Acting Executive Director I have rallied commission staff to focus on the mission and noble work of this agency. In addition, I have improved communication and collaboration with the Commission and have repeatedly emphasized that the Commission and staff must collectively work as a team to effectively achieve our shared mission. Our shared goals are articulated in the Commission's five year strategic plan which serves as my guide in carrying out this shared vision for the agency.

In my role as Acting Executive Director I am responsible for the management and operations of the entire agency and its 160 employees. This is no easy task given the scope of our work and the fact this is small agency that is chronically understaffed and historically has operated under a very tight budget. I have relied on a talented and tireless management team to effectively manage and operate this agency. It is critically important that duties and tasks are delegated to the management team and staff in order to operate the agency in an effective and efficient manner. I do not micro-manage my management team or staff. Clear communication among the management team and the Executive Director is critical to ensure the management team is collectively focused on priorities and goals of the agency.

As a Deputy Director, Senior Deputy Director and Acting Executive Director I have been very successful in negotiations with local government officials, permit applicants and with other government/agency officials in resolving conflicts and disagreements related to LCP planning, regulatory and enforcement matters. I have found the ability to connect with people and establish close working relationships with key local government officials, politicians and others who do business with the Commission is the most important attribute of an Executive Director. Cultivating strong professional relationships based on mutual trust and respect has proven over my long career with the Commission to be an effective way to resolve conflicts and disagreements. Other attributes that make for a successful Executive Director which I believe I possess are: integrity and professional ethics; good judgement/common sense; problem solving skills; objective and critical analysis; fairness; professionalism; teamwork and mutual support; kindness and civility; transparency and openness; dedication to public service; and a good sense of humor.

A core principal of the Coastal Act is the Commission's partnership with local governments and achieving certified LCPs in order to return permitting authority to local governments. As an agency we cannot be successful without forging strong partnerships with our local government partners. I have been successful in developing such partnerships and relationships with our local government partners. I also believe that building close partnerships with other state and federal agencies, as well as, non-governmental/non-profit

*John Ainsworth*  
*Qualifications Statement*

agencies is critical to the success of our agency. My management team and I have been working hard to establish such collaborative partnerships with other agencies over the past year.

It is very important that the Commission and commission staff understand and recognize their respective roles in the agency. The twelve voting member Commission is an independent quasi-judicial entity (similar to a judge) with members appointed by the Governor, Senate, and Assembly. Commission staff's role is to provide the Commission with independent professional recommendations based on the facts of a case, sound science, and the law. I believe it is staff's job to serve and support the Commission in their difficult decision and policy making role. As Acting Executive Director I have implemented several initiatives to better serve the Commission and improve communication and collaboration between the Commission and staff management.

The Commission's adopted five year strategic plan provides a road map to achieve our shared goals and I have been diligently working to accomplish these goals over the past four years as the Senior Deputy Director and Acting Executive Director. The strategic plan is scheduled to be updated in 2017 and it is now time to begin preparations for the next five year plan which I hope to have the opportunity to work on. There is no higher priority for the commission staff right now than our work on LCP grants to update out of date LCPs and to certify LCPs for uncertified jurisdictions. These grants place a strong emphasis on planning for climate change and sea level rise which is one of the greatest planning challenges this agency, the state and federal government has ever faced. Staff is currently working with our local government partners on 29 LCP grants which are on top of our existing regulatory and LCP planning workload. As the Acting Executive Director over the past year it has been my responsibility to keep these grant efforts on track under an existing heavy workload and a crushing number of lawsuits and Public Records Act requests. I have had to make difficult decisions on which regulatory and planning matters we focus our efforts on and which matters we will spend less time on or even let go.

I am excited and energized to be leading such a dynamic agency working on the cutting edge of regulatory and planning policy and issues. I am also looking forward to working with the Commission and the public on implementing our new authority to consider environmental justice issues in our regulatory and planning actions. In addition, continuing to recruit for and working to realize a more diverse commission staff that represents the population of the state is a high priority for me.

Finally, the only way this small agency has achieved such amazing success in the protection of our coastal resources and public access over the last 40 years is because of its talented, professional and mission driven staff. California's Coastal Program is recognized around the world as a progressive leader in the protection of coastal resources, land use planning and provision of public access. Given my extensive experience with the Commission and reputation as a collaborative and creative problem solver who is committed to efficient government focused on good outcomes, I believe I am exceptionally qualified for this position. I sincerely hope I have the opportunity to continue to lead and serve this exceptional agency and its staff into the future and continue its storied legacy of coastal protection, ensuring environmentally sustainable development and unfettered public access to California's glorious coastline.