

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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**Coastal Commission Breaks Saltwater Ceiling for Women Surfers**

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Staff recommendation: <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2016/11/w11a-11-2016.pdf>

Video (click on 11a): <http://www.cal-span.org/cgi-bin/archive.php?owner=CCC&date=2016-11-02&player=jwplayer>

HALF MOON BAY, Calif. _ The California Coastal Commission has granted a one-year permit to the organizers of the Titans of Mavericks surf event but declined their request for a multi-year permit, criticizing the group for not preparing a comprehensive plan for the inclusion of more women.

“We have reached a historic milestone in that a woman’s heat is being added at the Titans of Mavericks,” said Commissioner Mark Vargas, who has pushed for more women at the event. “While it’s great that we have a heat, that’s not a plan.”

The invitation only big wave surf contest features elite competitors from around the world, who get 48-hours-notice to surf Half Moon Bay’s treacherous waves on one day between the months of November 1 to March 31. The contest has been held since 1999 but until now no women have ever competed.

Last December the commission granted Titans of Mavericks a permit to hold its competition on the condition that they come up with a plan to include women in the event. The commission has a mandate to maximize public access under the Coastal Act, and they noted that the event effectively closes the beach and the offshore surf area to the public for the duration of the contest.

In October, Cartel applied for a four-year permit, and suggested an outreach program for women. The proposal was eventually expanded to include a women’s heat for next season’s contest. Commission staff, however, noted that this did not comply with the 2015 direction from commissioners who were concerned that approving a contest without a women’s heat may deny equal access opportunities for a significant segment of the public.

Organizers eventually committed to a one-hour women’s heat this season with six competitors for a prize of \$30,000. At Wednesday’s meeting, they also proposed including women on the now seven-member selection committee.

Commissioner Martha McClure said she found it “disheartening in the soul of my being” that organizers seemed to add a women’s heat only when it appeared they may not get their permit.

“There was a time climbing up Mount Everest was listed as only a man’s sport because women were not capable, women were not strong enough, women were not smart enough,” McClure said.

Supporters who lobbied the commission to add women included representatives from Surfrider Foundation, the Committee for Equity in Women’s Surfing, the Coastal Protection Network and San Mateo County Harbor Commission Sabrina Brennan. Many called the addition of a woman’s heat a step in the right direction but also said they wanted to see a traditional contest format with more heats for women, prize money equal to what male competitors receive and representatives on the selection committee chosen by female big wave competitors.

For their part, Maverick’s representatives said they supported including more women but remained concerned about pushing the limits of safety, saying these waves were bigger, colder and deadlier than other surfing locations. They also estimated there are fewer than 10 professional women surfers currently able to compete at this level.

Commissioners eventually approved a one-year permit, but declined Maverick’s request for a multi-year permit, saying if they came back with a comprehensive plan for women within the next year commissioners may reconsider.

“The Coastal Commission continues to apply the Coastal Act in unexpected ways.” said Acting Executive Director John Ainsworth, “That now includes helping to expand opportunities for women in big wave surfing, which shows what a unique and relevant law it continues to be.”