

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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TO: Commissioners and Interested Persons

FROM: Peter Douglas, Executive Director
Steve Scholl, Deputy Director

SUBJECT: Interagency Agreement with California Department of
Transportation for Highway Damage Management Plan for
Highway One in Big Sur

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into an interagency agreement to accept \$75,000 from the Department of Transportation to prepare the Coast Highway Management Plan for Highway One in the Big Sur area of Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties.

Staff Analysis:

Highway One and other state highways in the coastal zone are subject to frequent failure due to weather conditions, earth movement, and the age of the facilities. Highway One in the Big Sur area is particularly vulnerable to failure, but it is also a vital transportation link for coastal residents, visitors, and commerce. The highway was closed for 3-1/2 months due to damage from El Nino-related storms in 1998.

Repair activities to re-open Highway One in Big Sur or elsewhere following storm events involve the risk of adverse impacts to coastal resources. For instance, the disposal of slide material can result in siltation in coastal streams or nearshore waters, displacement of riparian habitat, spread of exotic plant species and impacts on the viewshed from the highway. In the past, the Commission has sometimes been forced to review proposals for disposal of slide material only after-the-fact, following emergency actions to re-open a portion of Highway One. At that point, options for disposal of slide material are either extremely limited or have been precluded (depending on whether the work continues in progress or has been completed). Negotiating mitigation requirements after the fact has also proven to be extremely difficult and costly, to the point where questions arise as to the state's responsibility as a steward of public funds.

The Department of Transportation has initiated a planning process for the management of Highway One in Big Sur. While a long-term management plan is envisioned, the work has been broken into two phases. Phase I would include elements such as planning for future highway damage and repair methods. Phase II is intended to be a comprehensive planning document (referred to as a Corridor Management Plan). Phase II would be the tool for providing long-range management to preserve, protect and enhance the unique qualities of the corridor. Specific issues may include design guidelines, opportunities for interpretive facilities and needs for capital improvements.

This planning effort, focussed first on Phase I, is underway in an effort to identify potential disposal sites. In order for the plan to be useful for coastal planning, it will need to fully reflect coastal zone regulatory requirements, including coastal permit requirements under the Coastal Act and federal consistency requirements under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act.

The purpose of this interagency agreement is to fund a planning effort that will result in preparation of a practicable plan for keeping Highway One in Big Sur open and for protecting coastal resources in the area, reflecting both the operational needs of Caltrans and the coastal zone regulatory requirements that exist. Under the agreement, funds will be made available to the Coastal Commission to support a staff position for a one-year period, to prepare the Coast Highway Management Plan (Phase I storm damage). The staff person will be able to draw on the knowledge and experience of the Commission to prepare the plan, including information about past Commission actions, regulatory requirements of the Coastal Act and the Coastal Zone Management Act, and on the experience and expertise of other staff members of the Commission. The target date for implementing this interagency agreement is December 1, 1998 and the work is expected to take approximately one year.