

Gaviota Coastal Trail Alliance



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Trails Council

California Coastal Commission
455 Market Street, Suite 228
San Francisco, CA 94105-2219

March 3, 2022

Re: Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program Update

Dear Commissioners,

The Gaviota Coastal Trail Alliance (GCTA) appreciates the opportunity to offer the following comments on the recent announcement from the State Agency Team regarding the Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program (HRCAP). We are grateful for the strong efforts of the State Agency Team to make progress on the HRCAP Plan and the implementation of public access at Hollister Ranch. We are particularly pleased with the identification of the California Coastal Trail in the Draft HRCAP Plan as a major Hollister Ranch access element. The CA Coastal Trail is a 50-year-old state aspiration that is a foundational element of any access at Hollister Ranch.

In its March 3, 2022 public announcement, the State Agency Team concludes that they will not meet the statutory April 1, 2022 deadline for completion of the HRCAP and they will need to complete a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the project which will likely take approximately 18 months.

GCTA is disappointed in this result. Ongoing delay by Hollister Ranch Owners Association (HROA) is a tactic that continues to serve the Ranch interests and preserve their near-exclusive use of a public resource and state lands. Governor Newsom signed AB 1680 in October 2019 and 2 ½ years (30 months) later we are delivered an additional 18-month delay until public access is provided.

This delay underwritten by HROA is a given. We understand the challenges and frustration when a recalcitrant party resorts to threatening litigation at the eleventh hour.

We also understand the reasoning given for a PEIR to be created to save time in the long run. We recommend and strongly seek interim milestones along the 18-month process so

that the EIR process meets its deadlines. GCTA anticipates being very active in the scoping process for this document and we request a very specific project description for the Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program PEIR. We should all anticipate the threat of a lawsuit at the eleventh hour of PEIR completion, as the PEIR, no matter how well thought through and drafted, and no matter the level of participation by HROA will undoubtedly meet opposition by HROA. It's a given.

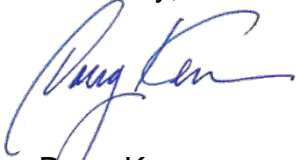
Voluntary Early Access to Hollister Ranch has also been disappointedly delayed. We greatly appreciate the efforts being made to provide Chumash peoples early access, and we also note that voluntary early access should be available to all citizens on an equal basis, not just selected sectors of the population. If no actual voluntary access program is forthcoming by HROA by June 1, 2022, then the public relations benefits accrued by HROA of proposing Voluntary Access should be withdrawn and this additional delay tactic should be strongly called out in the public press.

GCTA wishes to re-emphasize our willingness to engage with stakeholders, the State Agency Team and willing Hollister Ranch owners to find near-term productive solutions that advance meaningful, managed and limited, public access to Hollister Ranch that protects natural and cultural resources.

GCTA heeds the words of the Coastal Commission's former Executive Director, Peter Douglas. "The coast is never saved. The coast is always being saved."

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Doug Kern
Executive Director
Gaviota Coast Conservancy

The Alliance is an ad hoc, unincorporated association committed to securing environmentally responsible and non-discriminatory public access to beaches along the Gaviota Coast including the establishment of the California Coastal Trail within the sight and sound of the ocean.

Tax deductible contributions for this effort may be made to the GCTA's fiscal agent, Gaviota Coast Conservancy, at Post Office Box 1099, Goleta, California 93116

<https://www.gaviotacoastaltrailalliance.org/>