



C A L I F O R N I A
C O A S T A L
C O M M I S S I O N

Program Overview

The mission of the Coastal Commission is to:

Protect, conserve, restore, and enhance environmental and human-based resources of the California coast and ocean for environmentally sustainable and prudent use by current and future generations.

The California Coastal Commission was established by voter initiative in 1972 (Proposition 20) and later made permanent by the Legislature through adoption of the California Coastal Act of 1976.

The Coastal Commission, in partnership with coastal cities and counties, plans and regulates the use of land and water in the coastal zone. Development activities, which are broadly defined by the Coastal Act to include (among others) construction of buildings, divisions of land, and activities that change the intensity of use of land or public access to coastal waters, generally require a coastal permit from either the Coastal Commission or the local government.

The Coastal Act includes specific policies (see Division 20 of the Public Resources Code) that address issues such as shoreline public access and recreation, lower cost visitor accommodations, terrestrial and marine habitat protection, visual resources, landform alteration, agricultural lands, commercial fisheries, industrial uses, water quality, offshore oil and gas development, transportation, development design, power plants, ports, and public works. The policies of the Coastal Act constitute the statutory standards applied to planning and regulatory decisions made by the Commission and by local governments, pursuant to the Coastal Act.

The Commission is an independent, quasi-judicial state agency. The Commission is composed of twelve voting members, appointed equally (four each) by the Governor, the Senate Rules Committee, and the Speaker of the Assembly. Six of the voting commissioners are locally elected officials and six are appointed from the public at large. Three ex officio (non-voting) members represent the Resources Agency, the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, and the State Lands Commission.

The coastal zone, which was specifically mapped by the Legislature, covers an area larger than the State of Rhode Island. On land the coastal zone varies in width from several hundred feet in highly urbanized areas up to five miles in certain rural areas, and offshore the coastal zone includes a three-mile-wide band of ocean. The coastal zone established by the Coastal Act does not include San Francisco Bay, where development is regulated by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

Along with the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), the Coastal Commission is one of California's two designated coastal management agencies for the purpose of administering the federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) in California. The most significant provisions of the federal CZMA give state coastal management agencies regulatory control (federal consistency review authority) over all federal activities and federally licensed, permitted or assisted activities, wherever they may occur (i.e., landward or seaward of the respective coastal zone boundaries fixed under state law) if the activity affects coastal resources. Examples of such federal activities include: outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing, exploration and development; designation of dredge material disposal sites in the ocean; military projects at coastal locations; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers fill permits; certain U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permits; national park projects; highway improvement projects assisted with federal funds; and commercial space launch projects on federal lands. Federal consistency is an important coastal management tool because it is often the only review authority over federal activities affecting coastal resources given to any state agency.

Commission Meetings

The Commission holds monthly public meetings of three to five days in length in different locations throughout the state. The Commission meetings provide an opportunity for the Coastal Commissioners to take public testimony and to make permit, planning, and other policy decisions. Prior to each meeting, Commission staff collects and analyzes information pertinent to meeting agenda items and prepares written staff reports with recommendations for Commission action. These staff reports are available for public review, by contacting the appropriate

Commission office. Selected staff reports are also available electronically by means of a link from the Commission's Meeting Notice.

Public Participation

Members of the public may participate in the Commission's decision-making process by attending public hearings or by making their views known to the Commission prior to public hearings.

Key Statutory Responsibilities

California's coastal management program is carried out through a partnership between state and local governments. Implementation of Coastal Act policies is accomplished primarily through the preparation of local coastal programs (LCPs) that are required to be completed by each of the 15 counties and 60 cities located in whole or in part in the coastal zone. Completed LCPs must be submitted to the Commission for review and approval. An LCP includes a land use plan (LUP) which may be the relevant portion of the local general plan, including any maps necessary to administer it, and the zoning ordinances, zoning district maps, and other legal instruments necessary to implement the land use plan. Coastal Act policies are the standards by which the Commission evaluates the adequacy of LCPs. Amendments to certified LUPs and LCPs only become effective after approval by the Commission. To ensure that coastal resources are effectively protected in light of changing circumstances, such as new information and changing development pressures and impacts, the Commission is required to review each certified LCP at least once every five years.

Development within the coastal zone may not commence until a coastal development permit has been issued by either the Commission or a local government that has a Commission-certified local coastal program. After certification of an LCP, coastal development permit authority is delegated to the appropriate local government, but the Commission retains original permit jurisdiction over certain specified lands (such as tidelands and public trust lands). The Commission also has appellate authority over development approved by local governments in specified geographic areas as well as certain other developments.

The Commission reviews and acts on port master plans and amendments to them from the industrial ports of Hueneme, Los Angeles, Long Beach, and San Diego. Commission approval is necessary to allow port expansions to meet future growth needs. A similar requirement applies to land areas of universities in the coastal zone (e.g., the University of California campuses at Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and San Diego; Pepperdine University; and San Diego State University). The Commission also has an oil spill prevention and response program and a statewide Coastal Act enforcement program.

Under 1990 amendments to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, the Commission and the State Water Resources Control Board have prepared and adopted and are now implementing a Coastal Nonpoint Source Water Pollution Control Program. The Commission also implements a Coastal Access Program, in partnership with other state agencies such as the Coastal Conservancy, State Lands Commission, California State Parks and federal, regional and local park and recreation entities. The Commission carries out an extensive public education program that includes annual statewide coastal clean-up events, the "Adopt-A-Beach" program and the WHALE TAIL SM license plate program. It also maintains a Coastal Resource Information Center.