

Documentation of Existing Public Access at Edwards Point, Las Varas Ranch

Gaviota Coast, CA



September 16, 2014



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Trails Council

Introduction: Edwards Point on the Las Varas Ranch has a long history of informal use by members of the public. As disclosed below, historic public use includes fishing, hiking, beach walking, swimming, and surfing. This existing public use is threatened by proposals to develop two large estate residential compounds at Edwards Point. These residential estate compounds, including guest homes, walls or fences would lie across routes historically used by the public to gain access to shoreline at this location, effectively blocking public access. In addition, based on similar situations along the eastern Gaviota Coast and at locations such as Broad Beach in Malibu, the real potential exists for new development to use security guards, cameras and other security measure to interfere with or eliminate historic public access to the coast at Edwards Point.



Provision of public access to and acquisition of scenic Edwards Point has been planned by Santa Barbara County for over 30 years.

This brief report provides photographic and other evidence of substantial and sustained public access at Edwards Point to allow state and county decision-makers to understand the nature and importance of public access at Edwards Point. As part of its review of the impacts of Las Varas Ranch development proposal, Santa Barbara County has not undertaken any detailed or systematic surveys of existing public access or retained any recreational experts to assess such use, instead relying on hearsay and secondhand sources of information from a surf book, the project applicant's ranch manager and consultant surveying the site for other resources (e.g., biology). This report provides a greater level of information on existing public access.

Methodology: The information in this report was compiled local sources, including a photographer who has visited Edwards Point periodically over the last 5 or more years, with photographs taken episodically during this period, representing only a sampling of public use. This information is supplemented by field surveys compiled by the Santa Barbara County Trails



This photo depicts a hiker on the bluffs at the inner cove at Edwards Point looking west toward the point (background). This photograph was taken in winter- spring as indicated by the green pasture.

Council (Trails Council) during preparation of the Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study (Trails Council, 2013). These surveys were conducted in spring and early summer of 2013 outside of the winter surf season when use would be expected to be higher. Trails Council field crews consisting of an experienced Environmental Planner and 1-2 interns performed 12 days of field reconnaissance along the Gaviota Coast to survey and document existing coastal access routes, parking and beach use between Bacara Resort and Spa and Gaviota State Park. During these surveys, Trails Council field crews observed an average of 2-3 cars parked on El Capitan Ranch Road during the majority of these surveys. During several follow up public access surveys conducted during the late summer, Trails Council field crews noted as many as six cars parked at El Capitan Ranch Road, where parking south of US Hwy 101 serves as the "trailhead" for access to Edwards Point along the UPRR.

Existing Public Access Routes to Edwards Point

Primary public access to Edwards Point occurs along the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) corridor and across the bluffs on Las Varas Ranch west of Edwards Point and down to the beach at the Point (Figure 1). Public road shoulder parking is available along El Capitan Ranch Road, with space for approximately 15 cars. The public traverses the UPRR corridor along the tracks and this access has created a visible informal trail along the edge of the tracks.

Access follows the tracks for approximately 1,500 feet to the first ranch gate at an at-grade UPRR crossing (Figure 1). However, coastal access may also occur via the existing Gato Creek tunnel under the UPRR, located approximately 3,000 feet west of El Capitan Ranch Road.¹ After leaving the UPRR corridor, the public then follows several existing ranch roads and/ or cattle trail across the blufftop gaps in the steep bluff at Edwards Point west of Gato Creek (Figure 1). Access is also available to Edwards Point along the beach from El Capitan State Park to the west and the Naples informal coastal access located two miles to the east and west respectively. However, due to the intertidal nature of area beaches and the presence of rocky points, such beach access is reliable only at low tides. Based on Trails Council field surveys in September of 2014, lateral access from the east may be available at a "0" low tide and from the west at tides of from 0 to 1 foot. Such tides occurred for several hours on 13 of 30 days in September of 2014, allowing lateral access on 40% of the days in



Trails Council surveys of the Gaviota Coast indicate ongoing use of El Capitan Ranch Road for coastal access parking to the beach at Edwards Point.

¹ The Trails Council has documented existing access along the UPRR during field surveys and observed hikers entering the ranch, as well as the presence of the informal trail along the tracks and signs of ongoing public use along UPRR, including multiple footprints. Trails Council crews have also observed the public climbing through fences near the west end of the ranch.



September, but only for several hours each day, or between 10% to 20% of available daylight hours during this month (Southern California Tide Log 2014, Pacific Publishers).

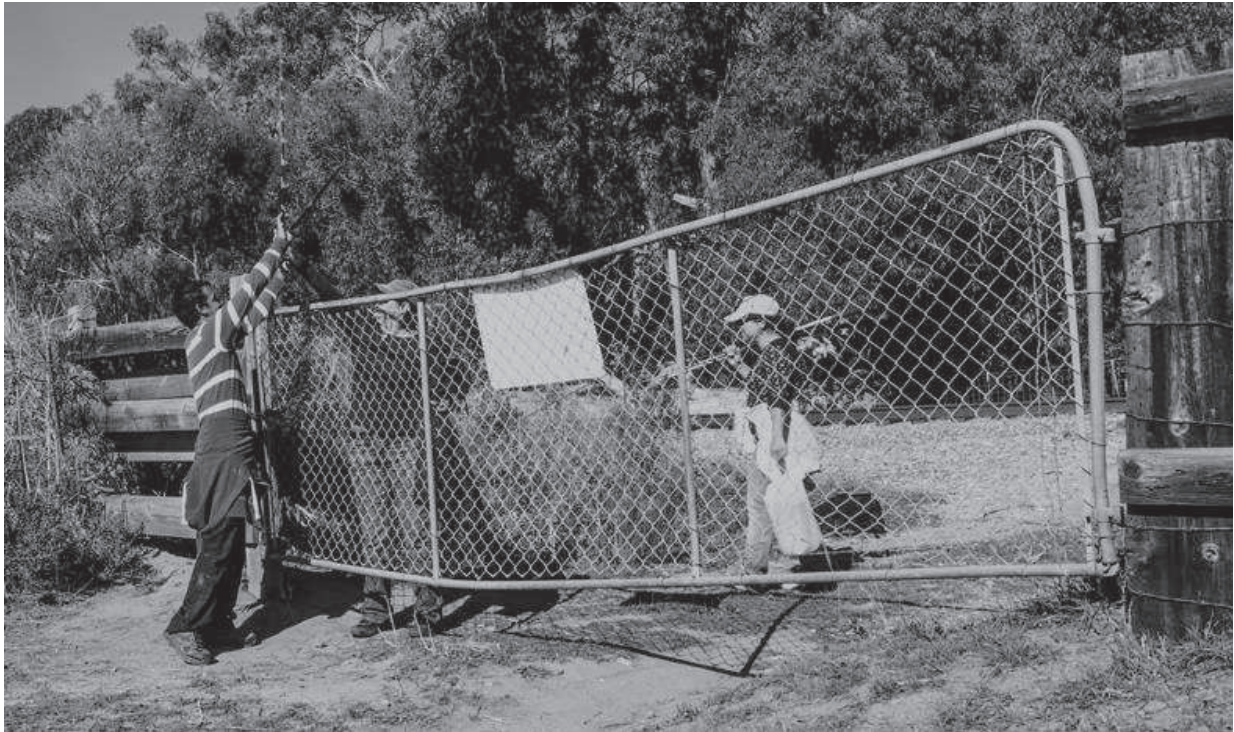
Existing Levels of Public Access at Edwards Point

The level of existing public access to Edwards Point has not been well documented as part of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Las Varas Ranch Development Project. However, 2013 Trails Council surveys of the Gaviota Coast documented regular public parking at El Capitan Ranch Road on more than 50% of the days such surveys were conducted during the spring and summer, outside of the primary surf season. Trails Council surveys also documented the public using the UPRR corridor to access the ranch as well as public access from an existing blufftop trail system that Links Las Varas beaches with Dos Pueblos Canyon and beach.

In addition to Trails Council surveys, photo-documentation compiled by a local photographer also indicates diverse and sustained use. These episodic surveys confirm regular ongoing use of access to Edwards Point by fishers, hikers and surfers on many of the days that surveys occurred. Such surveys indicate that Edwards Point receives regular use by members of the public, including fishers from Los Angeles, Santa Maria and Lompoc and college surfers. Taken together, Trails Council surveys and those by a local photographer have documented public parking at El Capitan Ranch Road and / or use of the UPRR and / or Edwards point on more than 15 days during limited periods of each of these days. Ongoing public use is likely to be far more extensive than such surveys reveal as the surveys did not cover the entire day and Trails Council surveys occurred outside the winter surf season and were not focused on Las Varas Ranch alone, but the entire eastern Gaviota Coast. Still, the following photographs represent a more substantial body of evidence than the hearsay relied upon in the County's EIR.



El Capitan Ranch Road west of Edwards Point has sufficient road shoulder parking within public right of way to accommodate approximately 15 vehicles. In this photo, ten cars are visible indicating the probability that 10 or more people are accessing Edwards Point at this one moment in time. However, as shown in later photographs, parties of 2, 3, 4 or even as many as 5 individuals are documented visiting the Point together. This could raise the number of people at the point to 20 or 30 during this period on a single day.



This party of three fishers is leaving the Las Varas Ranch Bluffs and handing equipment over the western ranch gate after fishing at Edwards Point. The UPRR lies in the background. This gate lies approximately 1,500 feet west of available on street parking on El Capitan Ranch Road.



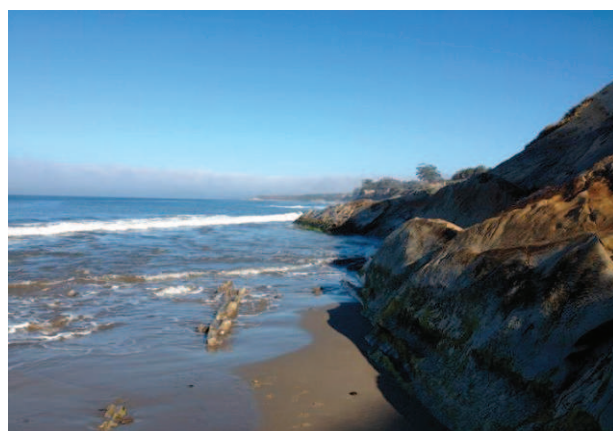
This man was photographed walking west along the UPRR after leaving the Edwards Point area. His Car is parked on El Capitan Ranch Road approximately 1,500 feet to the west, past the cypress and eucalyptus trees in background. Note faint trail paralleling tracks to the left. Trails Council surveys observed footprints and bike tracks along this trail after rains in spring of 2013.



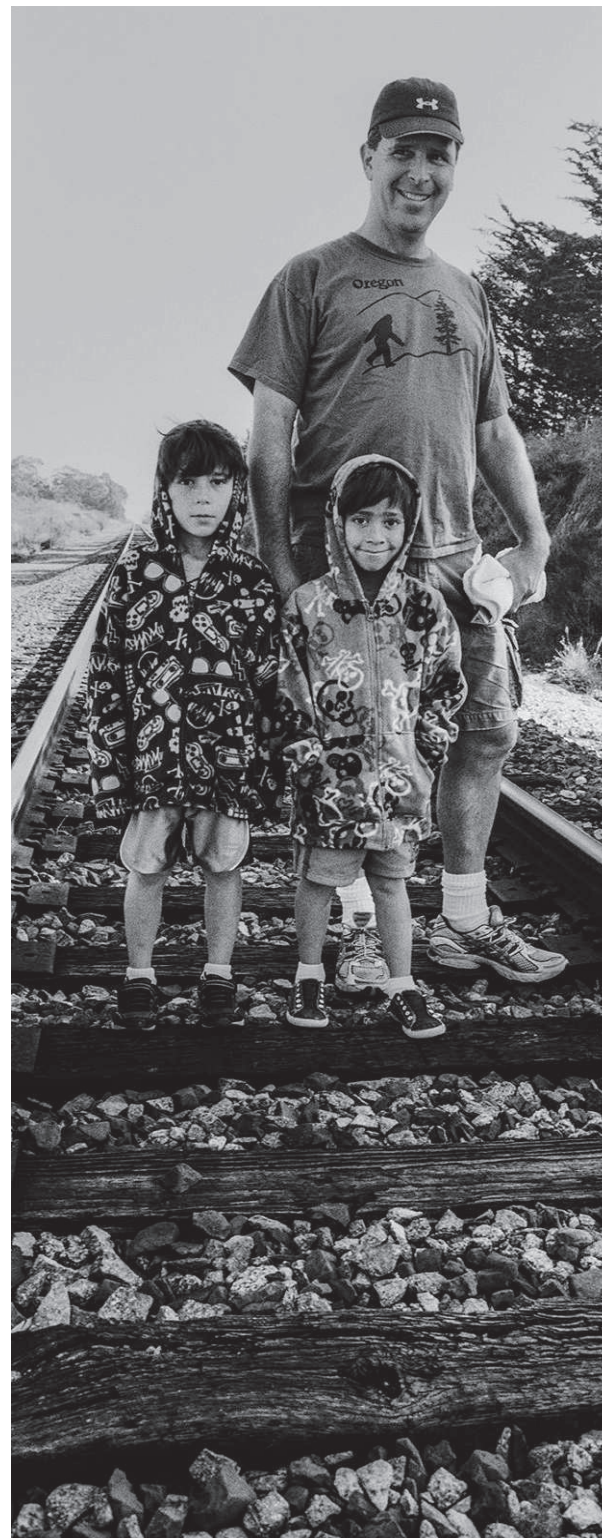
The UPRR corridor offers the primary access route from public parking along El Capitan Ranch Road to Edwards Point.



The Gato Creek tunnel under the UPRR offers another way to reach Edwards Point from the informal public access corridor along the UPRR. This tunnel is used by ranch vehicles and to move cattle between pastures.



Lateral access to and along Las Varas Ranches' intertidal beaches is restricted to low and moderate tides.



This father and two sons are heading to the beach at Edwards Point and are west of the first at-grade railroad crossing. The Trails Council has interviewed other surfers that have taken their children into Edwards point.



This trio of fishermen from Santa Maria is walking down the trail to Edwards Point from the Las Varas Ranch blufftops; Gato Creek lies in background. The distant point is on Dos Pueblos Ranch east of Las Varas Ranch.



The same trio of Santa Maria fishermen revisited Las Varas Ranch on a different day than the photo above (note clear skies); they are using the blufftop trail on Las Varas Ranch.



Two young hikers view Edwards Point from bluff top on Las Varas Ranch down coast and east of the Point.



A party of four college students using the UPRR corridor to access Edwards Point; they had parking their car on El Capitan Ranch Road. They are leaving the UPRR at the western at grade crossing and enter the ranch at gate to right.



A photographer is engaged in filming at Edwards Point from the blufftop down coast or east of the Point. The beach at Las Varas Creek and Dos Pueblos Point lie in distant background.



A party of Korean fishers from Los Angeles climbs a ranch gate to access Edwards Point. They had parked at El Capitan Ranch Road, walked along the UPRR and across ranch roads to reach the beach by Edwards Point.



Fishermen on beach west of Edwards Point with catch during a minus tide. Note lack of dry sand beach berm on this intertidal beach; this beach would be impassable at medium or high tides (i.e., majority of many days).



A party of five fishermen from Los Angeles enjoys the fire pit and picnic area at Edwards Point.



A Lompoc family of four enjoys fishing on beach west of Edwards Point. They had parked at El Capitan Ranch Road, walked the UPRR corridor and used ranch roads to access beach at Edwards Point. Note that the intertidal beach is all wet sand and the lateral access would be limited at higher tides.



A lone surfer scrambles over a ranch gate to access Edwards Point. Note UPRR tracks in foreground and no trespassing sign.



Surfers and their five dogs on bluffs in seaside pasture just west of Edwards Point. Note that their faces have been obscured as requested.



A beach goer descends the informal coastal access trail down the bluff face near the beach shack located just east of Las Varas Creek. This trail connects to a blufftop coastal trail that extends east to Dos Pueblos Canyon.

Importance of Public Access to Edwards Point: Protection and improvement of public access to and along the coast is a key goal of California's State Coastal Act as well as Santa Barbara County's Local Coastal Plan (LCP). Coastal Act Policy 30211 states that *"Development shall not interfere with the public's right of access to the sea where acquired through use, custom or through legislative authorization..."*. Santa Barbara County's LCP Policy 7-1 states: *"The County shall take all necessary steps to defend the public's constitutionally guaranteed rights of access to and along the shoreline."*

This paper provides substantial evidence that public access to and use of Edwards Point is ongoing and consists of diverse user groups from locations as widely separated as Los Angeles, Lompoc, Santa Maria and UCSB. Photographs and field observations by Trails Council survey crews have documented at least 15 different days of public access to and/ or use of Edwards Point as well as parking at El Capitan Ranch Road. In contrast, the County's draft EIR on the Las Varas Ranch development project provides no maps of access routes, photographic evidence of access or use of systematic surveys focused on recreation. As such, this paper provides substantial evidence in the record of existing public coastal access across Las Varas Ranch.

The County's LCP notes that existing coastal parks are used to capacity especially on summer weekends. We also note that the County's official trail advisory body, the County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee has found that existing and long planned access at Edwards Point is an issue of significant concern and that its loss would be a significant issue. No new formal public coastal access has been developed on the Gaviota Coast in the last 30 or more years. Acquisition and development of such access is costly and can require years or decades to implement. The high priority placed on protecting such coastal access in adopted county and state laws and policies combined with evidence of sustained and diverse ongoing use and the difficulty of providing new access increases the importance of existing access at Edwards Point.



A man sitting atop bluffs at west end of Las Varas Ranch. He had completed the beach walk of almost 3 miles from the Naples access Point during a low tide event.



This informal fire pit and seating area at Edwards Point receives is used by a range of is people, including surfers, fishermen and hikers.



This beach shack and fire pit at the east end of Las Varas Ranch is testament to ongoing use of the area. A trail up the bluff faces links this site to residences on ranches adjacent to Las Varas Ranch to the east, with a coastal trail extending for almost ½ miles to the east connecting with Dos Pueblos Ranch. The public uses this blufftop trail to bypass rocky points which impede lateral access at most tides west of Dos Pueblos Canyon beach.

Affects of Tides on Lateral Coastal Access at Las Varas Ranch

Gaviota, California



[Photos Courtesy of California Coastal Records Project](#)



September 18, 2014



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Trails Council

As part of a development review County and State policies require provision of public access along the shoreline even at high tide. The Las Varas Ranch development project, as proposed, would eliminate existing informal access along the coastal bluff tops. However, the proposed granting of lateral access along the beach would not guarantee the public's right to passage along the shoreline the majority of the time due to tides. This paper explores the affects of tides on lateral coastal access at Las Varas Ranch.

Introduction: Las Varas Ranch is located on the eastern Gaviota Coast, approximately ½ mile east of El Capitan State Beach Park in southern Santa Barbara County. The eastern Gaviota Coast encompasses approximately 20 miles of shoreline that extends from the City of Goleta west to Gaviota State Park. The Beach Erosion Authority for Clean Oceans and Nourishment (BEACON) notes that Beaches along the Gaviota Coast are characterized by *relatively thin veneers of sand over hard bedrock and are backed by high bluffs and marine terraces*. BEACON also notes that *the numerous pocket beaches that exist are generally narrow and bounded by rocky points or headlands*. Some wider sandy beaches do exist at lower relief coastal areas and stream discharge locations (BEACON, 2009). As a result, many Gaviota Beaches are intertidal, particularly during the winter and spring when sand levels are low. Beaches and coves such as Deadmans, Dos Pueblos, Las Varas, El Capitan, Coral Canyon, Tajiguas, Refugio and Gaviota are often located at creek mouths or “stream discharge locations” where sediment from streams supports wider pocket beaches that can support dry sand beach berms, particularly in summer.



Beaches along Las Varas Ranch are strongly intertidal, with access often restricted along much of the ranch at modest tides of 2-4 feet. High tides and waves often reach the base of the bluffs, particularly west of Edwards Point (background), limiting public access along the shoreline.

As a result, many Gaviota Beaches are intertidal, particularly during the winter and spring when sand levels are low. Beaches and coves such as Deadmans, Dos Pueblos, Las Varas, El Capitan, Coral Canyon, Tajiguas, Refugio and Gaviota are often located at creek mouths or “stream discharge locations” where sediment from streams supports wider pocket beaches that can support dry sand beach berms, particularly in summer.

Public access to and along this shoreline is limited. Developed public vertical access to the beach exists at only three locations over this 20 mile-long shoreline; El Capitan, Refugio and Gaviota State Beaches. However, 22 major and multiple minor informal access trails cross both state and private lands to provide access to many pocket beaches, including diving, fishing and surf break locations such as Naples, Edwards Point, Tajiguas and Canada de Leon at the Gaviota Marine Terminal (Santa Barbara County Trails Council, 2013). Due to the narrow and often intertidal nature of these beaches, public lateral access along this shoreline is strongly influenced by seasonal sand supply and tidal conditions, with many rocky headlands limiting lateral access, particularly during winter. While the beauty and isolation of these beaches is one of their attractions, difficult and time restricted lateral access limits public use.

Purpose of this Report: This report was prepared by the Santa Barbara County Trails Council (Trails Council) to inform the general public and county and state agency staff and decision-makers regarding existing lateral access conditions along beaches at Las Varas Ranch, particular how access is influenced by tides, seasons and sand supply. Protection and expansion of access to and along the shoreline is a key element of state and county policies as embodied in the State Coastal Act and is an important concern for many California residents and visitors alike. The loss of public access to and along the State's shoreline was a key driver of the enactment by the voters of Proposition 20 in 1972, which led to passage of the Coastal Act and creation of the California Coastal Commission.

The Las Varas Ranch encompasses approximately 2 miles of shoreline or more than 10% of the Gaviota Coast between the City of Goleta and Gaviota State Park. It is largest single privately owned undeveloped shoreline ranch in southern Santa Barbara County south of Point Conception and possibly all of Southern California. As such, public access to and along the shoreline at this location is an important consideration. County and potentially State decisions regarding a pending development project on the Las Varas Ranch will affect existing informal public coastal access, proposed acquisition of and public access to Edwards Point on the Las Varas Ranch, which has been planned by the County and State for over 32 years. This paper examines and analyzes existing lateral beach to understanding of the relationship of such lateral beach access to existing state and county policies and proposals for access to and along the coast included in the Las Varas Ranch Development project.

Methodology: The Trails Council surveyed Las Varas Beaches on four occasions in 2012-2014 during preparation of the Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study (Trails Council 2013) and review of the impacts of the proposed Las Varas Ranch development project on public coastal access and recreation. Trails Council staff reviewed Coastal Records Act Aerial photos, surveyed the beaches, recorded tides, photographed sand conditions and evidence of tidal levels and observed public use and access. Access was obtained along the beach from the east and west, generally at low tides due to restrictions on passage along the coast at higher tides. The Trails Council utilized tide data for 2014 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to project the effects of tides on lateral access on Las Varas Beaches. The Trails Council also communicated



Many Gaviota area beaches support a thin layer of sand over underlying rocky marine terrace and may not develop a dry sand summer beach berm, limiting lateral public beach access during periods of low sand supply such as spring and winter. During such periods, sand can be largely absent from some beaches as shown in this high tide photo looking west from Dos Pueblos bluff tops toward Las Varas Ranch and Edwards Point to the west.

with and reviewed documents prepared by the California State Lands Commission (CSLC), an agency charged with addressing lateral access issues and assessing the boundary between public and private lands along the shoreline. Additional details on the methodology are provided in various subsections of this report as needed below.

Regulatory Framework Governing Coastal Access: Public access to the shoreline is guaranteed by the California Constitution. The State Coastal Act sets forth six key goals to manage the state’s Coastal Zone , including one related too recreation and coastal access which states:

“Maximize public access to and along the coast and maximize public recreational opportunities in the coastal zone consistent with sound resources conservation principles and constitutionally protected rights of private property owners.”

Under California’s constitution, land lands below the Mean High Tide Line (MHTL) are public property. As a rule of thumb, such lands can be discerned by the ordinary high water mark, which means land regularly subject to submersion. Although not formally surveyed, in practice due to the intertidal nature of many of the beaches along the Las Varas Ranch, this means that public property below the MHTL extends landward close to or at the toe of the coastal bluffs along many of the regions beaches.

In order to help guarantee public access along the shoreline, the County’s adopted Local Coastal Plan requires the County to protect and defend the public’s right to access to and along the shoreline (Table 1). County policy also requires dedication of lateral access easements to allow for public access along the shoreline and states that *“at a minimum, the dedication easement shall be adequate to allow for lateral access during periods of high tide.”* The implication of the policy for the location of lateral access along strongly intertidal Las Varas Ranch beaches requires careful consideration during review of development projects.

Table 1: County Policies that Address Lateral Beach Access

<p>CLUP Policy 7-1: <i>The County shall take all necessary steps to protect and defend the public's constitutionally guaranteed rights of access to and along the shoreline. At a minimum, County actions shall include:</i></p> <p><i>(a) Initiating legal action to acquire easements to beaches and access corridors for which prescriptive rights exist consistent with the availability of staff and funds.</i></p> <p><i>(b) Accepting offers of dedication which will increase opportunities for public access and recreation consistent with the County's ability to assume liability and maintenance costs.</i></p> <p><i>(c) Actively seeking other public or private agencies to accept offers of dedications, having them assume liability and maintenance responsibilities, and allowing such agencies to initiate legal action to pursue beach access.</i></p>	<p>CLUP Policy 7-3: <i>For all new development between the first public road and the ocean, granting of lateral easements to allow for public access along the shoreline shall be mandatory. In coastal areas, where the bluffs exceed five feet in height, all beach seaward of the base of the bluff shall be dedicated. In coastal areas where the bluffs are less than five feet, the area to be dedicated shall be determined by the County, based on findings reflecting historic use, existing and future public recreational needs, and coastal resource protection. <u>At a minimum, the dedicated easement shall be adequate to allow for lateral access during periods of high tide.</u> In no case shall the dedicated easement be required to be closer than 10 feet to a residential structure. In addition, all fences, no trespassing signs, and other obstructions that may limit public lateral access shall be removed as a condition of development approval.</i></p>
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Tidal influence on Lateral Access: In order to determine the extent of tidal influence on lateral access at Las Varas Ranch, the Trails Council utilized tide data for 2014 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Four months were selected (see Table 2) to represent the tidal variations across the four seasons (i.e., winter, spring, summer, fall). To review conditions on Las Varas Beaches, the Trails Council conducted surveys of the beaches in spring of 2012, spring and summer of 2013 and fall of 2014. Based on observations made during these surveys over the past two years and review of California Coastal Records Project aerial photographs, the Trails Council assumed that all beaches were passable at a negative or minus low tide. Although rocky conditions can make passage difficult in some locations in winter, it is assumed that under these conditions lateral access is provided along the entire 2 mile coastline of Las Varas Ranch. Additionally, based on past observations, the Trails Council assumed that the majority of beaches are passable at less than two foot tides, and that some beaches are passable at a less than four foot tides. However, as the tide rises from negative tides to four foot tides lateral access becomes constricted across the coast line, submerging beaches and creating isolated pocket beaches (e.g., beach at Las Varas Creek).

Trails Council calculated average sunrise and sunset times for typical seasonal months (e.g., January, winter). Trails Council then looked at each low tide value and calculated the percentage of low tides that occurred below one of the above threshold values (e.g., negative tides, less than or equal to two foot tides, less than or equal to four foot tides) within daylight hours. For example of the 120 high and low tide values provided by NOAA for Santa Barbara County, only 16 of these values were negative and occurring within daylight hours. Additionally, only 25 of these 120 tide values were below two feet and occurring within daylight hours. Trails Council used this proxy to estimate the percentage of time that the Las Varas Beaches were laterally accessible to the public.

Table 2: Tidal Influence on Lateral Access at Las Varas Ranch

Season (Month)	Average Sunrise	Average Sunset	All Passable (<0 ft)	Majority Passable (≤ 2 ft)	Some Passable (≤ 4 ft)
Winter (January)	7:03 AM	5:13 PM	13%	21%	27%
Spring (April)	6:27 AM	7:32 PM	5%	28%	43%
Summer (July)	6:00 AM	8:10 PM	2%	16%	42%
Fall (October)	7:06 AM	6:23 PM	4%	14%	22%

It should also be noted that this analysis cannot precisely correlate the typical beach profile at the Las Varas beaches, which also fluctuates on annual and decadal timescales. Heavy wave attack associated with El Niño years may result in a narrower beach profile, further constricting lateral access. For example, 13 percent of the low tides during the winter months are negative and assumed to provide complete lateral access; however, during winters characterized by strong wave action the beach profile may be reduced such that tides must be less than -1 foot to provide complete coastal access. Nevertheless, this data is still valuable as an estimate for lateral access. It is clear that uniform access is rare at the Las Varas Beaches ranging from approximately two percent of the time during the summer to 13 percent of the time during the Winter. The seasonal effects of tides on lateral access are shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 below.

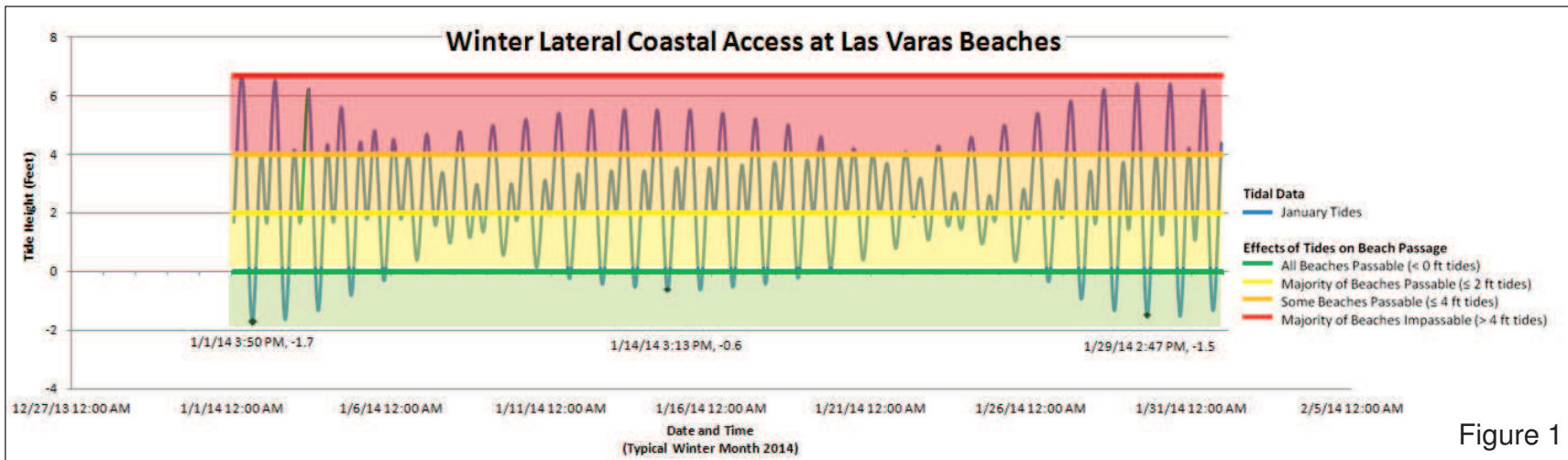


Figure 1

Source: NOAA 2014. Notes: January was selected as the typical winter month as it occurs mid-way through the winter season, and is therefore less likely to pick up transition periods between the seasons.

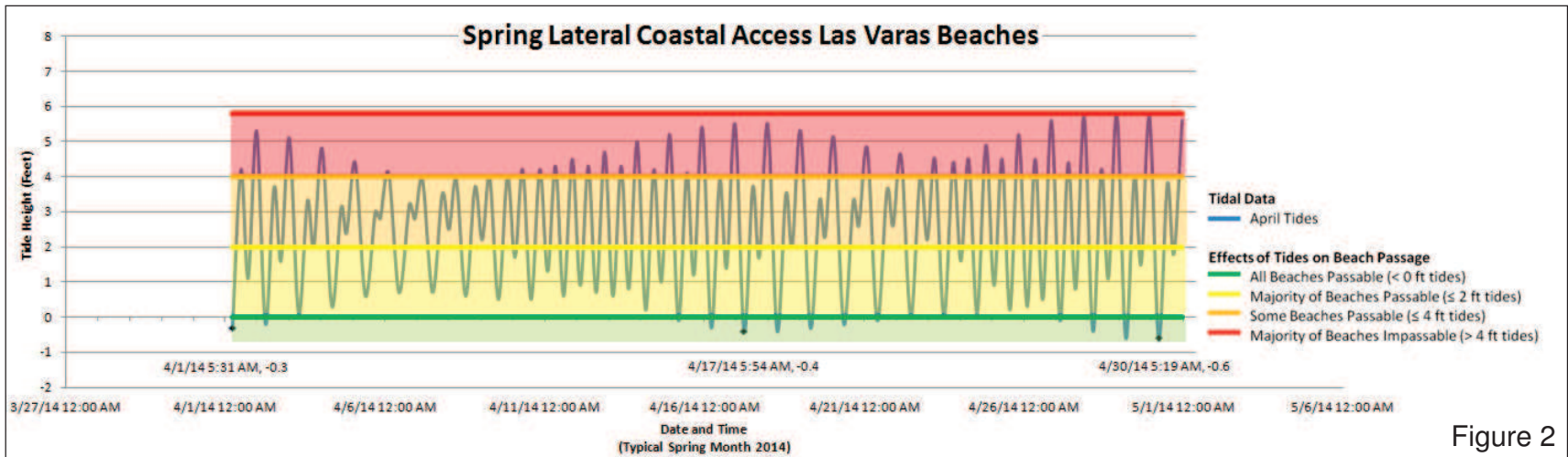


Figure 2

Source: NOAA 2014. Notes: April was selected as the typical spring month as it occurs mid-way through the spring season, and is therefore less likely to pick up transition periods between the seasons.

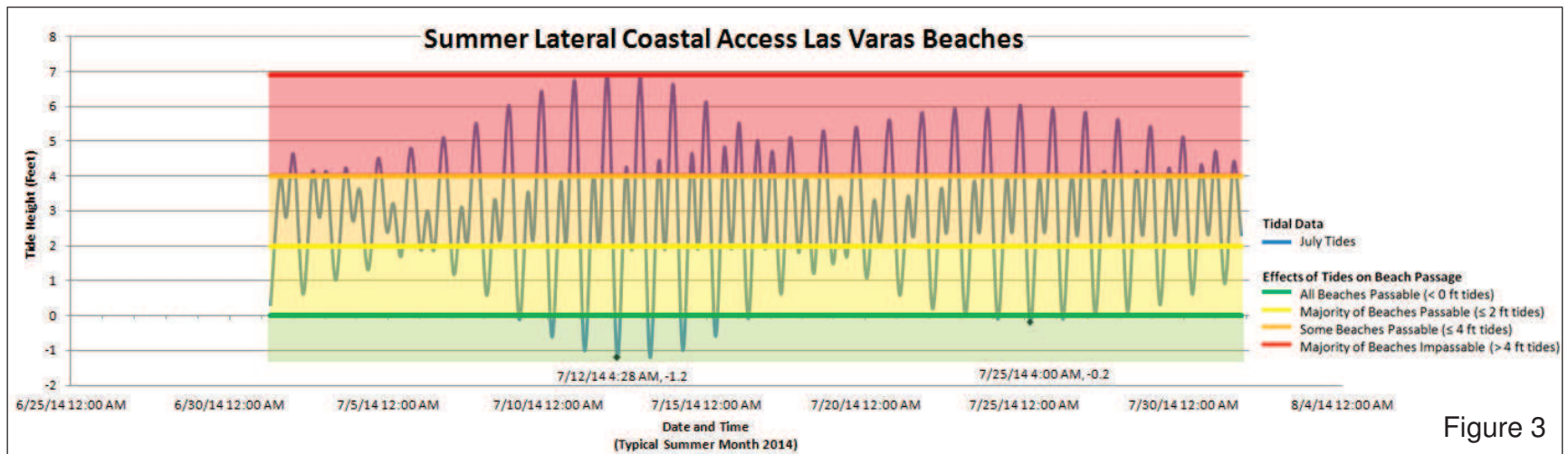


Figure 3

Source: NOAA 2014. Notes: July was selected as the typical summer month as it occurs mid-way through the summer season, and is therefore less likely to pick up transition periods between the seasons.

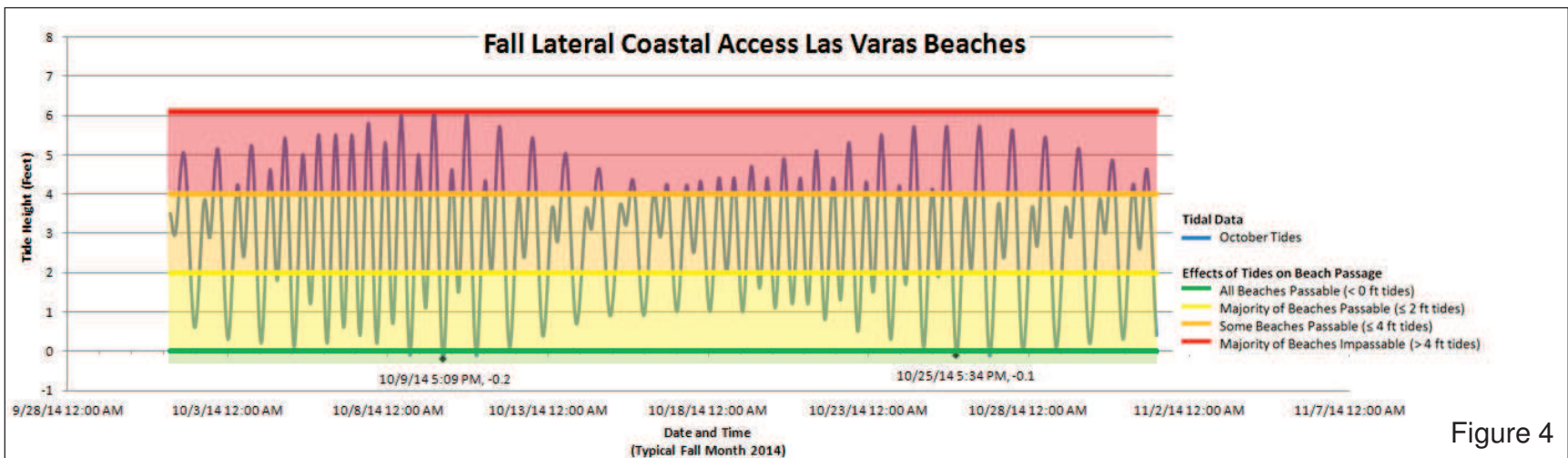


Figure 4

Source: NOAA 2014. Notes: October was selected as the typical fall month as it occurs mid-way through the fall season, and is therefore less likely to pick up transition periods between the seasons.

Availability of Lateral Access on Las Varas Beaches: Beaches along Las Varas Ranch allow for differing levels of public access based upon observed beach profile and width, sand supply and tides. The availability of access varies over multiple years, seasonally and daily based on these factors. Beaches can widen after major storm events, fires and influxes of sand into the system or narrow in responses to loss of sand through major storms or lack of sand input. As discussed below, based on our field surveys, historic aerial photographic research and tidal analysis provided above, in most years, the majority of beaches fronting the Las Varas Ranch would be submerged at tides of above 4 feet (Figure 5).

The Las Varas Ranch has approximately 2 miles of shoreline. The eastern 4,800 feet of shoreline is characterized by a long sandy beach which extends from a rocky point located 300 feet east of Las Varas Creek west to a rocky cobble headland in “Edwards Cove”, approximately 1,000 feet east of Edwards Point. This long beach overlies a rocky marine terrace, where in summer and times of abundant sand, a modest dry sand beach berm forms, particularly near Las Varas Creek. However, in winter or periods with low sand supply (i.e., September, 2014), this beach is intertidal, with high tides reaching the base of the bluff and lateral access regularly available at tides below +4 feet. Therefore, even in summer during a low sand year, passage along this beach can be obstructed at modest or high tides due to this sometimes narrow beach being submerged.

The 1,000 feet of beach within the cove east of Edwards Point is more regularly intertidal. Based on field observations, the Trails Council estimates that most of this cove would be submerged at a +3 foot tide, with the narrowest areas of the cove becoming submerged at a 2 foot tide. The increasing presence of cobbles approaching Edwards Point also makes passage difficult and beach goers would be required to scramble over slippery cobbles at higher tides.



The beach at Las Varas Creek (looking west) supported a modest dry sand beach berm in late spring of 2013. However, high tides reach near the base of the bluff limiting the timing and duration of public access (note line of seaweed).



The beach at Las Varas Creek (looking east towards the creek) supported no well-developed dry sand beach berm in September 2014 and high tides reached the base of bluff limiting the timing and duration of public access (note line of seaweed).

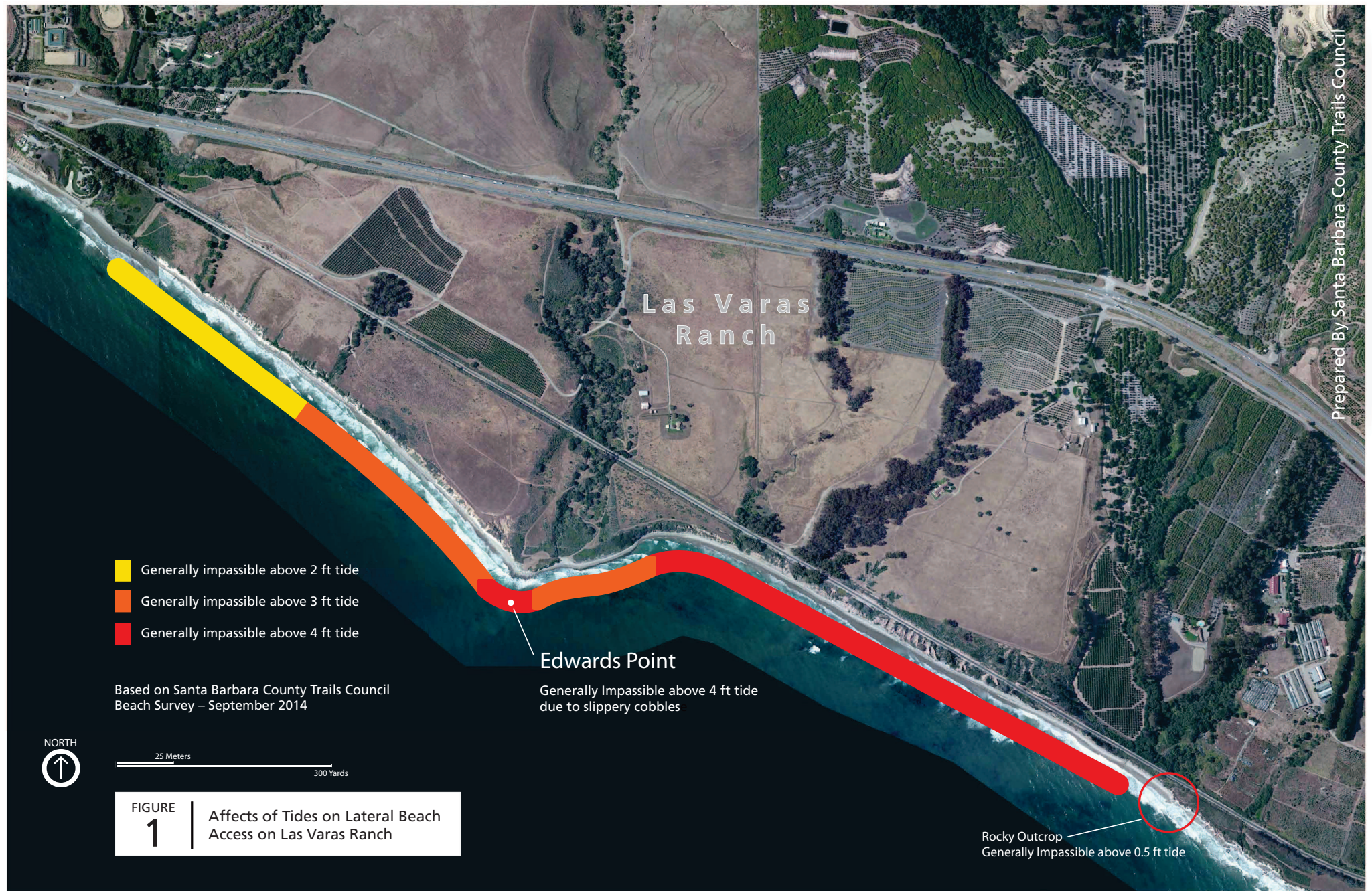


FIGURE 1 | Affects of Tides on Lateral Beach Access on Las Varas Ranch

Lateral access and beach passage at Edwards Point appears to be available at up to a +4 foot tide. The large cobbles mound up at the Point, allowing access to those willing to scramble the large slippery cobbles even at high tides.



The cove east of Edwards Point is more strongly intertidal than beaches to the east and appears to be generally submerged above a +3 foot tide. Cobbles and rocky outcrops can make lateral access more challenging here, even at low tide. Edwards Point is in the background.



Rocky points limit lateral access from Dos Pueblos Canyon east to Las Varas Beach (background); at a low tide of +1.7 feet on August 16 of 2014, access west to Las Varas Beach was blocked by waves and rocks. Lateral access was available by scrambling over rocks at a +0.5 tide.



Lateral access on the sandy intertidal beach along the eastern 4,100 feet of Las Varas Ranch is limited by rocky points to the east (right), which prohibit access east to Dos Pueblos creek except very low or minus tides. In years with ample sand, a dry sand beach berm may develop allowing lateral access. However, in winter and low sand supply summers, later access can be impeded along this beach at even moderate tides (note narrow beach berm).

In general, based on field surveys and review of historic aerials from 2002 to 2014, Las Varas beaches west of Edwards Point are the narrowest and most strongly intertidal beaches that front the ranch. These beaches appear to be regularly submerged by relatively modest tides of +2 feet or more. In this area, the public regularly uses the bluff top to access Edwards Point.



Scenic rocky outcrops such as this one west of Edwards Point can present challenges for lateral access.



Las Varas beaches near the west end of the ranch west of Edwards Point is strongly intertidal, with the entire beach often submerged at moderate tides.



Beach along Las Varas Ranch west of Edwards Point appears to be the most strongly intertidal of those fronting the ranch. Here, lateral access along the shoreline is generally restricted to tides below + 2 feet. The bluff top west of Edwards Point is also the area of the ranch that receives the highest level of informal access by the public as beach goers traverse the bluffs to reach Edwards Point; proposed development would block this existing informal access, limiting public access along the coast to low or minus tides.

Conclusions: Based on Trail Council research and field work, key conclusions of this study include:

1. State Coastal Act Section 30211 protects public access to the shoreline that has been acquired through “*use or custom*”. Santa Barbara County LCP Policy 7-1 requires that “*The County shall take all necessary steps to protect and defend the public’s constitutionally guaranteed rights of access to and along the shoreline*”. County LCP Policy 7-3 requires that “*For all new development between the first public road and the ocean, granting of lateral easements to allow for public access along the shoreline shall be mandatory...*” and that “*At a minimum, the dedicated easement shall be adequate to allow for lateral access during periods of high tide.*”
2. The public currently accesses the beaches along Las Varas Ranch primarily via informal access along the Union Pacific Railroad and across the bluff top west of Edwards Point, with more limited use of the bluffs east of the Point (Trails Council 9/16/14). The proposed development of Las Varas Ranch would close or substantially interfere with such access. While public access to these beaches does occur along the beach from the east and west and through Las Varas beaches such access is limited to low or at best moderate tides. Access along the shoreline at moderate to high tides inhibits public lateral access much of the time.
3. The proposed dedication of dry sand beach included as part of the proposed Las Varas Ranch development project would not guarantee or allow for public access along the shoreline as required by state and county policy. In particular, the public would not be able to access Edwards Point, the location of existing and planned access, much of the time due to tidal restrictions. Further, while a formal Mean High Tide Line Survey has not been completed, field surveys and review of historic aerial photographs indicate that private lands on the beach along the Las Varas Ranch are likely limited as many of the beaches fronting the reach are strongly intertidal. This limits public benefits associated with dedication of dry sandy beach.
4. If public access along the shoreline is to be guaranteed consistent with state and county policy, dedication of a nearshore coast trail would be required. Such a trail would permit public access between tidally isolated beaches such as that at Las Varas Creek and Edwards Point.



Acquiring public access to and along the shoreline at Las Varas Ranch is an important County and State policy goal. However, provision of public vertical access to the often intertidal beach at Las Varas Creek (pictured) would not facilitate public access along the shoreline to Edwards point at moderate and high tides as required by County policy.