



ACCESS FOR ALL

A New Generation's Challenges on the California Coast

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California is a world leader in protecting its coast and advancing the right of all people to access and enjoy our beaches and ocean. Many other states and countries have modeled their coastal management efforts on California's example. Yet, our state is facing emerging challenges to public access to the coast. In this report, we present new research findings on California's coastal access challenges and make recommendations for addressing them.

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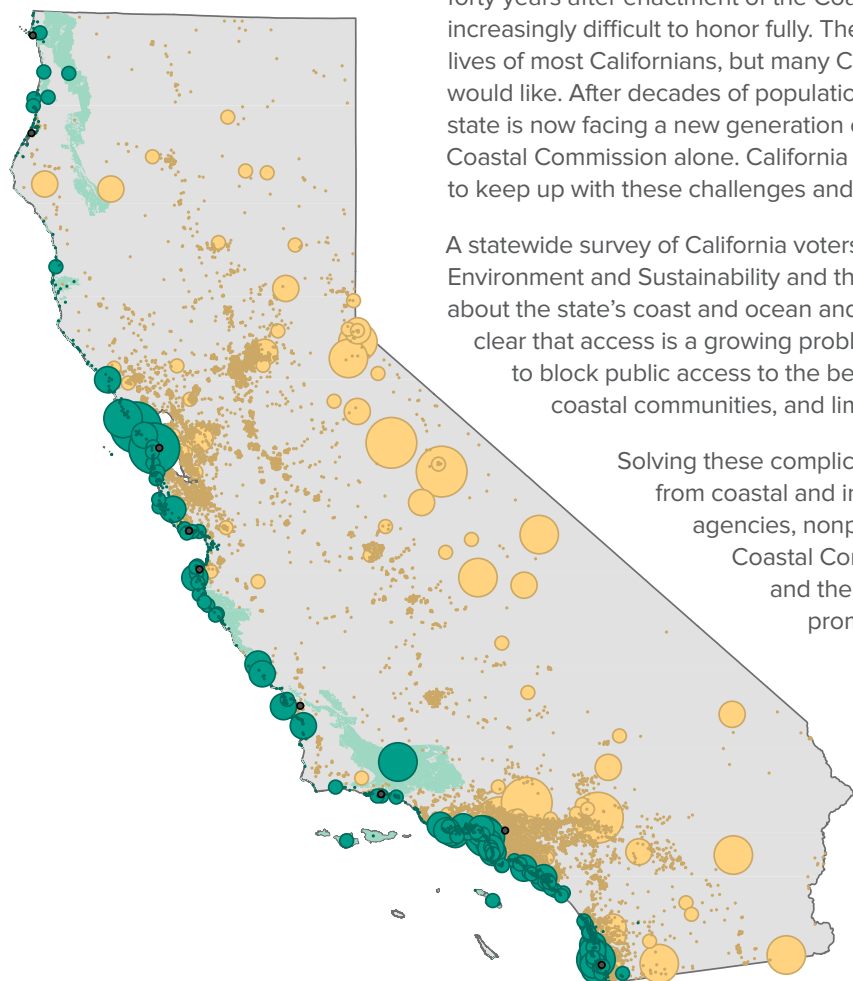
The California Constitution first recognized that coastal tidelands belong to the people of the state in 1849. In 1972, California voters enacted Proposition 20, a landmark law that provided for stronger management of California’s coastal areas and required a statewide program for maximizing public access to the coast, protecting and restoring coastal resources, and balancing new development with conservation. In 1976, the state legislature adopted the California Coastal Act, codifying the state’s policy and responsibilities on the coast, declaring that the coastal zone “is a distinct and valuable natural resource belonging to all the people,” that protecting its “natural and scenic resources” is a “paramount concern to present and future residents of the state and nation,” and that “maximum access” to the coast “shall be provided for all the people.”

The Coastal Act applies to the entire California coast and to all state agencies. To lead the Act’s implementation, the Legislature created the California Coastal Commission (the Commission), an independent state agency, and charged it with regulating land and water uses along the coast and guiding development of “local coastal programs” that, in turn, shape local land-use and development decisions. The Commission considers public access in all of its permitting and planning decisions. The State Coastal Conservancy (the Conservancy), created at the same time as the Commission, plays a complementary, non-regulatory role by supporting acquisition of land and easements that provide coastal access; construction and improvement of coastal trails, recreational facilities, and overnight accommodations; and protection and restoration of coastal resources. Both agencies operate grant programs that support nonprofits’ and public agencies’ efforts to provide coastal access and recreational opportunities as well as outreach, educational, and stewardship programs that focus on the coast.

Since the 1970s, the Commission, the Conservancy, and their many partners have made substantial contributions to protection and enhancement of public access along the coast. Yet forty years after enactment of the Coastal Act, its promise of maximum access for all is proving increasingly difficult to honor fully. The coast remains central to the identity of California and the lives of most Californians, but many Californians are not able to enjoy the coast as much as they would like. After decades of population growth and demographic and land use changes, our state is now facing a new generation of coastal access challenges that cannot be solved by the Coastal Commission alone. California will need innovative policies, programs, and investments to keep up with these challenges and maintain meaningful access to the coast for all.

A statewide survey of California voters conducted in October 2016 by UCLA’s Institute of the Environment and Sustainability and the Field Poll found that Californians care as deeply as ever about the state’s coast and ocean and regularly go to the beach. But their responses make clear that access is a growing problem, challenged by the efforts of some private landowners to block public access to the beach, the high cost of visiting and staying overnight in coastal communities, and limited public transportation options for getting to the coast.

Solving these complicated challenges will require communities and leaders from coastal and inland communities, from the private sector, government agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic organizations, as well as the Coastal Commission, Coastal Conservancy, California State Parks, and the governor and legislators to work together to fulfill the promise of the Coastal Act in the future.



COASTAL ZONE PARKS AND PUBLIC BEACHES

Our coast and public beaches are a crucial part of California’s system of parks and open spaces. This map shows relative visitation rates to all of California’s local, regional, state, and national parks—on the coast (green) and inland (gold)—which we estimated based on Instagram users who post photos from these public spaces. Data courtesy of Stamen Design.

What the Coast Means to Californians

There is overwhelming concern among Californians about access to the coast and strong public support for keeping the Coastal Act's promise of access for all.

A vast majority of voters in the state—90 percent—told our poll that the condition of the ocean and beaches in California is important to them personally, with 57 percent saying it is “very important.” There is broad agreement across voter subgroups about the importance of the coast, with majorities of voters of all age, ethnic, and income groups, as well as voters in coastal and inland counties, confirming that the condition of California's ocean and beaches is important to them.

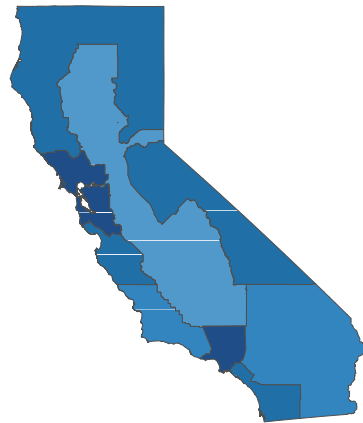
Our coast and beaches are among our most democratic spaces. Three out of four California voters—77 percent—visit the coast at least once a year, and many visit more often. One in four say that they visit the coast once a month or more, while another 38 percent visit several times a year. Voters under age 40, parents of children under age 18, and those residing in coastal counties are more likely than others to visit the coast more frequently.

A beach intercept survey of 1,146 people at eleven Southern California beaches in Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties, conducted by the authors in the summer of 2016, found that the primary reasons that people come to the coast are widely shared across all demographic groups. We found remarkable consensus among different age, income, and ethnic groups when we asked why they come to the beach, what they do at the beach, and

the obstacles they encounter getting to the beach. Across all of California's diverse demographic groups, people come to the beach to relax and enjoy the scenery, and to give their children a place to play. They come to walk, and wade or swim in the surf. When they get to the beach, they want clean sand and water, and they expect basic amenities such as trash cans, restrooms, and parking.

CALIFORNIANS LOVE THE COAST

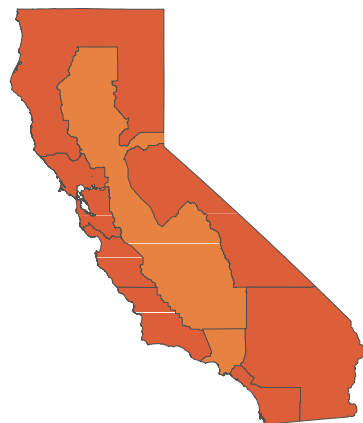
Between 83 and 94 percent of California voters say the condition of our ocean and beaches is important to them personally. Darker colors represent a higher percentage of voters in each region.



Today's Access Issues

Yet, despite the Coastal Act's guarantee of access for all, our poll and beach surveys found significant barriers. Access to the coast was cited as a problem by 62 percent of voters, a significant majority. Limited affordable options for parking were seen as a problem by 78 percent of voters. And 75 percent cited limited options for affordable overnight accommodations, which was rated a big problem at a higher rate by Latino voters and families with children. Limited public transportation options were cited as an important barrier to the coast by 68 percent of voters.

Central Valley voters are less likely to visit the coast, with 39 percent visiting less than once a year. African Americans are also less likely to visit the coast, with 33 percent visiting less than once a year, and 30 percent of those indicating that not knowing how to swim is one reason they do not go to the beach more often. Income is also a factor. Voters with annual household incomes greater than \$60,000 are more likely to visit



LACK OF AFFORDABLE OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Between 73 and 76 percent of California voters say limited affordable options for overnight stays on the coast are a problem. Darker colors represent a higher percentage of voters in each region.

the coast more frequently than those earning less than \$40,000 a year. Our beach intercept surveys corroborated these findings from the statewide poll and also found that the overall cost of visiting the coast is more of a limiting factor for people between 30 and 39 years old and for families with children. And a lack of affordable options for overnight stays is more of a factor for people 18 to 39 years old and families with children.

Beach and Beachgoer Profiles

While people mostly come to the coast and beaches for similar reasons and want similar things when they get there, the demographic profiles of individual beaches can be strikingly different. Some beaches more closely reflect the demographic diversity of California and surrounding communities than others. For example, beachgoers at Santa Monica Beach fairly closely reflect the demographics of California, while also drawing visitors from other states and countries. A little farther south, Dockweiler State Beach, under the flight paths of airliners departing from Los Angeles International Airport, attracts more Latinos, African Americans, and families with lower household incomes than Santa Monica Beach, while farther south, Doheny State Beach in Dana Point in Orange County attracts more white visitors from families with higher household incomes. These patterns are likely the result of a complex combination of factors, including self-sorting, or people choosing beaches where they will feel welcome; the amenities that are available at different beaches, such as the fire rings at Dockweiler; and the communities closest to each of these beaches, which influences who comes to the beach; as well as historical patterns of visitation and discrimination at different beaches.

To face the next generation of access challenges, we have to understand these patterns. We also need to understand that while coastal access is important and guaranteed for all by the Coastal Act, not everyone has the same needs and faces the same challenges accessing the beach. Through our statewide poll and beach surveys we found that identifying some of the various factors that affect different kinds of beachgoers can help us think through strategies to address these needs and challenges.

Young people, 18 to 24 years old, are more likely to come to the beach alone to swim or wade. Public transportation is more important to them. And they are concerned about cost, particularly the cost of overnight accommodations at the coast.

Families with adults 35 to 44 years old tend to come in larger groups. They want a place for their children to play. And they are more likely to stay in a hotel if they stay overnight on the coast. They are more concerned about the availability of affordable parking adjacent to the beach and the cost of overnight accommodations.

Latino beachgoers are more likely to be millennial parents with children who are seeking a place for their children to play. They come in larger groups. Amenities such as parking, restrooms, and trash cans are more important to them. And they like to see lifeguards on duty. They are concerned about the cost of parking and overnight accommodations and the lack of public transportation options for getting to the beach.

Older beachgoers, over 75 years old, are more likely to come to the beach alone or with one other person. They come to walk on the beach. They want



hapakang

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Since I was a kid, I've appreciated the sense of freedom playing on the beach, the ability to wander, and become immersed in the ocean ecosystem...



zboycontreras
Venice Skatepark

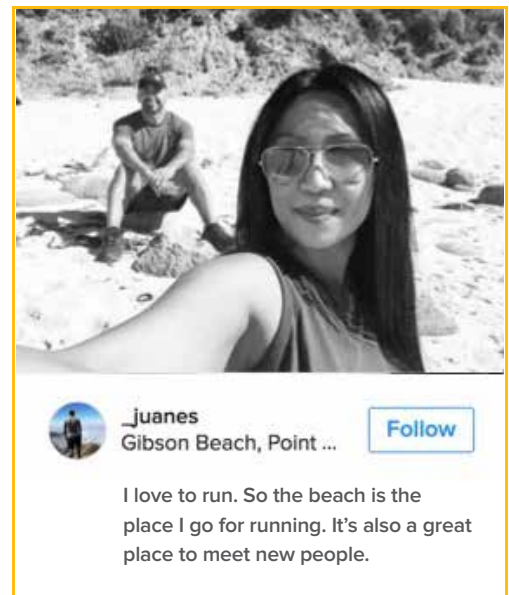
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A lot of people think a perfect beach is one in commercials with two people in the middle of nowhere on lounge chairs. But that's just a vacation. The perfect beach is one you can go to every day and there are lots of people there and it's alive.

parking nearby and are concerned about the lack of public transportation. Cost is a concern for them. They spend less time each day on the beach, and visit less often, but their overnight stays are longer.

Beach visitors who travel longer distances to the coast come less often. And they tend to be concerned about cost, particularly the cost of overnight accommodations, as they may want to stay overnight.

Three out of four California voters—77 percent—visit the coast at least once a year, and many visit more often.



The Cost and Value of Visiting the Coast

In order to better understand the key components that factor into the cost of visiting the coast, we examined the overall value and cost of visits for beachgoers in our surveys, as well as their willingness to pay for parking and lodging.

The availability and cost of parking are seen as a problem by 78 percent of California voters. And in our beach intercept surveys we found that most visitors said nearby parking is essential. In our statewide poll and beach surveys, we asked people about their “willingness to pay” for parking. We found that the median amount that people said they are willing to pay for parking for a day at the beach is \$8.75. Younger people are willing to pay more than older people. Households with children are willing to pay more than those without children. And households with higher incomes are willing to pay more on average, though very few if any are willing to pay more than \$15 per day for parking.

It is important to note that “willingness to pay” findings reflect people’s stated preferences and not their actual behavior. We know that many of the respondents to our beach surveys in Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties often paid significantly more than \$8.75 for parking based on the actual current cost of nearby parking. So how do we interpret this kind of data? It is useful to know that the cost of parking is perceived as an important barrier to access to the beach. When we look at the value of a daytrip to the beach, we will see why people are so sensitive to the cost of parking.

The cost of overnight lodging on the coast is likely to be an even more important barrier to access, particularly for visitors from inland areas of the state. In our statewide poll, we found that, on average, California voters stated that they were willing to pay \$117.65 per night for lodging on the coast. Visitors from coastal areas are willing to pay more on average than visitors from inland counties, although visitors from inland counties might be expected to have more need for overnight accommodations given travel distances to the coast. Latinos and African Americans were willing to pay less on

For many Californians, the cost of a trip is the biggest barrier to visiting the coast.



average to stay overnight at the beach. And households with children were willing to pay more, as were households with higher incomes.

These findings were corroborated by our beach surveys, although visitors who were surveyed on the beach said they were willing to pay slightly less for lodging. Beachgoers in households with California's median income of \$63,636 were willing to pay \$82 per night for overnight accommodations. Households with 80 percent of the median income, or \$50,908, which is a commonly used definition of "disadvantaged households" in California policy and law, were willing to pay \$78 for overnight accommodations. And Latino households were willing to pay on average \$16 less than other households in the survey. One out of five people we surveyed at the beach were staying overnight on the coast. Just over half of them—54 percent—were staying in a hotel, motel, or short-term rental, 29 percent were staying with family or friends, 10 percent were camping or staying in an RV or boat, and 4 percent were staying in a second residence or long-term rental.

We reiterate that these "willingness to pay" findings are useful signals of people's preferences. And the cost of overnight accommodations on the coast is perceived as a problem by many Californians. But these results need to be interpreted in the context of other information about people's actual observed behavior.

Accordingly, we also used a "travel cost model," a standard tool used in economics, to estimate the demand for beach visits and the value of trips based on how much it cost people to travel to the coast. The travel cost model gives us more information about how much visitors actually value a visit to the coast. It is a useful approximate indicator of the value of a trip to the beach based on people's observed behavior.

In our surveys of actual beachgoers, we calculated that the average value of a daytrip to the beach based on the total economic demand for daytrips is \$36.74 and that the average cost of traveling to the beach and home again—not including the costs of parking, food, and activities—was \$22.09. The difference of \$14.65 is the "surplus value" generated by the average daytrip. If the average trip were to cost \$15 more, many visitors might elect not to visit the beach. This finding explains why beachgoers are sensitive to the cost of parking and day use fees, which can exceed \$15 in many locations.

For overnight visitors, we calculated that the average value of a multi-day trip to the coast was \$605.05, with roundtrip travel costing on average \$194.41—not including the price of overnight stays—leaving a surplus value of \$410.64. With overnight visitors staying an average of four nights on the coast, the surplus value left over for accommodations is just \$102.66 per day. Given the difficulty of finding a place to spend the night on the coast for that amount, it is easy to see why Californians might decide they cannot afford to visit.

While we should be cautious and avoid relying too much on any single number in these analyses, our findings clearly show that for the majority of visitors, a trip to the California coast is a close call in terms of cost. These numbers help illuminate why so many of the people we surveyed in our statewide poll and on beaches are concerned about the cost of visiting the coast. Our research strongly indicates that the principal factors affecting the cost of visiting the coast are distance from the coast, and thus the cost of getting to the coast, and the cost of overnight accommodations and parking. Individual factors, such as income, age, and whether a family is traveling with children are important, too, in shaping whether and how often Californians visit the coast.

We need to ensure that these most democratic of public spaces are equally accessible to everyone, now and in the future.

Conclusion

The California coast and beaches are among our state's most important democratic spaces. Despite our differences, we all share a love of the coast and many of the same desires and reasons for coming to the beach. Under the Coastal Act, our beaches are open to all of us under the law. We need to make sure they are also equally accessible to everyone, now and in the future.

Many different players will need to come together to address today's coastal access challenges. Local transportation authorities control most public transportation on the coast. Parking is managed by a variety of agencies, from local cities,

counties and other agencies, to regional, state, and even federal entities. A variety of park agencies as well as nonprofit community organizations provide coastal access opportunities through recreational programs, especially for youth. And while State Parks manages campgrounds and cabins along the coast, much affordable lodging is provided by the private sector. Our current and future coastal access challenges cannot be solved by the California Coastal Commission, State Coastal Conservancy, and State Parks alone, although they and the governor and legislature can provide leadership that will be essential for success.

Recommendations

To address the next generation of challenges to providing coastal access for all, we offer the following recommendations:

➤ **Focus legislative and executive branch attention on the coast.** Today's coastal access challenges are complicated. They will not be met without sustained, focused attention from the California Legislature and the executive branch of state government. Most importantly, California's leaders should understand that the coast is home to some of California's most valued public parks and open spaces—including the beach itself—and that millions of Californians of all backgrounds visit the coast each year, many from hours away. Updated and enhanced policies and funding are likely to be important strategies for improving coastal access. For example, California could allocate increased funding to public transportation to beaches and coastal parks, as well as to development and improvement of affordable overnight accommodations and recreational facilities. California could also develop and support grant programs that help provide lower-income and middle-class families with outdoor recreational and educational opportunities along the coast. Such solutions could stand alone, or they could be integrated into broader measures designed to enhance California's parks, transportation, and public health. Finally, California should ensure that coastal public access programs at agencies such as the Coastal Commission and Coastal Conservancy have sufficient staffing and resources to collect needed data about coastal users, develop and implement strategies to meet emerging public needs, and support local and nonprofit efforts to enhance access. Leadership is also important for coastal access: for example, new appointees to the Coastal Commission and other agencies with coastal management responsibilities should clearly understand California's demographic changes and evolving access challenges, as

well as California's legal requirement to maximize public access to the coast for all. Finally, the Commission and Conservancy, despite their dedicated and often successful efforts, cannot do this alone. Other partners, such as the State Lands Commission and State Parks (managers of a third of California's coastline), local governments, the private sector, nonprofits, and philanthropies, will also have important roles to play. A wide range of partners should be encouraged and supported to take part in programs that protect and improve access to the coast.

➤ **Change the narrative of coastal access.** For the first forty years of the Coastal Act, ensuring coastal access has been interpreted by many to mean providing direct physical access to and along California's publicly owned tidelands and beaches. Physical impediments to direct access remain, with some wealthy landowners illegally blocking the public from getting to the beach. Accordingly, the Coastal Commission and other agencies with coastal management responsibilities must remain vigilant in protecting existing and, where possible, opening new public accessways to the beach. At the same time, more attention needs to be paid to providing adequate public transportation to the coast, increasing the availability of outdoor education and recreation opportunities, particularly for young people who have not experienced the coast, and the protection and provision of affordable recreational opportunities and overnight accommodations that meet the needs of lower-income and middle class families. This next generation of challenges will be more complex and require collaboration with many other players, from leaders in coastal and inland communities, to the private sector, government agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropies, as well as the governor and legislators. The Coastal Commission and Conservancy should focus communication efforts on telling that story and on building effective partnerships in the coming years.

➤ **Protect and increase the supply of lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast.** Solving this barrier is



key to providing access to the coast for many Californians. It cannot be solved by the Coastal Commission and Conservancy alone, but they can and should lead the effort. The Coastal Commission is embarking on an initiative to develop standards and policies for maintaining the existing supply of lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast. With the Conservancy as a non-regulatory partner, along with other key partners such as State Parks, local park and open space agencies, and local governments, the Commission can help to stop the decline in the supply of lower-cost accommodations and increase that supply over time. This goal should be made a high priority and given adequate support to succeed.

- **Enhance options for getting to the beach using public transportation.** Low-cost express buses to the beach from inland communities in the San Fernando Valley have long been popular on summer weekends in Los Angeles and may be a good model for other areas. The last quarter-mile to the beach is particularly crucial. People do not want to walk more than a few blocks when they get to the coast, especially if they are elderly visitors or families with small children loaded down with beach and picnic gear. Public transportation needs to get to the beach. If it does not, a stop-gap solution, such as a shuttle across the last stretch, will likely be necessary for people who take public transportation to the coast.
- **Recognize that adequate and affordable parking is understood by many Californians as a critical element of coastal access.** Parking on the California coast is perceived as a problem by a majority of people from every corner of the state. Visitors want to park no more than a few blocks from the beach. And the average amount that they say they are willing to pay for parking is under \$10 a day. At the same time, parking and day use fees can help to pay for needed amenities that enhance visitors' experiences along the coast. User fees are part of the revenue stream that supports parks in California. The Legislature could provide better policy guidance for the fees set by State Parks, and the Coastal Commission could work with other agencies on the coast to establish more predictability for visitors in different regions of the coast. Increasing predictability in parking and day use fees—and helping visitors understand what their fees pay for—could reduce uncertainty and

confusion and increase support for reasonable fees if visitors understand how they are contributing to maintaining and improving coastal access. California could also explore ways to make it easier for low-income families and individuals to get passes that provide free or low-cost use of parks and parking areas along the coast.

- **Support groups changing the culture of access to the coast.** Dozens of groups up and down the coast are working in a variety of creative ways to promote coastal access and deepen the ties of diverse Californians to our coast and beaches. Groups such as Brown Girl Surf in Northern California and Outdoor Outreach in San Diego bring young people to the beach, including youth who live near the coast, but have never been to the ocean. The Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) is organizing low-income communities to ensure that they have a voice in development decisions along the coast and enjoy the same kind of access to the coast and beaches as more wealthy communities. There are many other nonprofit groups and parks and recreation agencies doing similar work in coastal and inland communities, and more are emerging. These organizations depend on philanthropic and public funding to sustain their outdoor education and recreation programs and more support is needed to expand these efforts beyond coastal communities and counties to help inland communities, and particularly young people, gain access to and experience the California coast. The future of California's passion for protecting and enjoying our coast and ocean will depend on them.

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