

STAFF REPORT

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CONSIDER SUPPORTING AB 1680 (LIMÓN) IN THE 2019-20 LEGISLATIVE SESSION THAT WOULD REQUIRE THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CALIFORNIA STATE COASTAL CONSERVANCY, THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION, AND THE STATE LANDS COMMISSION TO DEVELOP A NEW COASTAL ACCESS PLAN FOR HOLLISTER RANCH IN THE COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

SUMMARY:

This bill would require the California Coastal Commission, in collaboration with the State Coastal Conservancy, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the State Lands Commission, to develop a new coastal access plan for Hollister Ranch in Santa Barbara County that will replace the existing access program that was adopted many decades ago.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Hollister Ranch is a 14,000-acre coastal subdivision in Santa Barbara County. In 1970, the property was subdivided into a gated community comprised of 136 private parcels and commonly owned open space. The 8.5-mile coastline, which is among the most beautiful in California, is generally inaccessible to the public. The Gaviota Coast, of which Hollister Ranch is a significant part, is the least accessible stretch of coast in California, with less than 2 miles of publicly accessible shore in more than 60 miles of coastline.

Nearly 40 years ago, the Legislature directed the California Coastal Commission and the State Coastal Conservancy to adopt, fund, and implement a coastal access program at Hollister Ranch. In 1982, the California Coastal Commission created the Hollister Ranch Coastal Access Program, which was to include bicycle, pedestrian, and van access; restrooms and picnic areas; general hours of operation; and daily visitation caps. The 1982 Coastal Access Program was never implemented.

AB 1680 provides statutory direction and codifies the agencies' commitment to create a new, contemporary, and meaningful coastal access program. It also specifies plan components, including land-based access, beach recreational areas, and scientific/educational areas, and includes a deadline for progress. The bill establishes a process for increasing the \$5,000 access in-lieu fee that is assessed for coastal development permits at Hollister Ranch and specifies that

STAFF REPORT NO. 94 (CONT'D)

the fee is to fund management costs. This fee was supposed to increase by 5 percent annually once a program was in place but has languished at the original amount. This bill requires, by April 2020, and every 5 years thereafter, that the State Coastal Conservancy make findings and provide recommendations to the California Coastal Commission regarding any legislation that may be needed to adjust the in-lieu public access fees in an amount sufficient to fund implementation of a new coastal access plan for Hollister Ranch.

In August 2018, the Legislature passed AB 2534 (Limón), which would have created two subaccounts to fund the acquisition and management of access ways necessary to implement the 1982 Coastal Access Program. The bill would have directed state agencies to use their legal authority to obtain public access at Hollister Ranch. Governor Brown vetoed the bill, stating that while well intentioned, it relied on the implementation of a coastal access program adopted in 1982 that is now outdated. Governor Brown stated “this bill relies on the implementation of a coastal access program adopted in 1982... it is now outdated.” Governor Brown directed state agencies to “work together to craft a sensible and fiscally responsible plan.” AB 1680 addresses the veto message from by requiring a new coastal access plan.

Last year, the California Coastal Commission sent a letter to the State Lands Commission requesting the Commission’s help in using its authorities to assist in achieving meaningful public access at Hollister Ranch. In December 2018, in response to the Coastal Commission’s request, the Commission undertook a weeks-long mean high tide line survey along the Hollister Ranch coastline, using its land surveyors and aerial drones, and by mid-March, surveyed the entire 8.5 miles of coastline. From this data, staff produced image mosaics, 3D models, and aerial video footage, which will be particularly useful in developing a contemporary coastal access plan.

In March 2019, the executive staff of the State Lands Commission, California Coastal Commission, Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Coastal Conservancy entered into a collaboration agreement to develop a contemporary Hollister Ranch coastal access program. The agreement establishes a framework for the agencies to expeditiously develop a coastal access program informed by meaningful and comprehensive public outreach and stakeholder engagement—one that reflects the values of current and future generations of all Californians, respects the treasured resources, attributes, and opportunities at Hollister Ranch, and that is consistent with the law and furthers state policies.

Under the agreement, the California Coastal Commission, the agency that will adopt the program, will lead its development and organize and host a twice-monthly conference call among the agencies, as well as coordinate the program

STAFF REPORT NO. 94 (CONT'D)

development schedule to include public outreach and engagement, research and analysis, data and analysis sharing, and document routing and review. The agencies will provide input consistent with their areas of expertise. State Parks will provide input on land management and operations, such as maintenance, interpretive programs, cultural resource programs, law enforcement and visitor services, and will consider integration with its other park properties. The Coastal Conservancy will assess the feasibility of implementation for the access program and provide input on possible funding sources or public or private partnerships to facilitate implementation. The State Lands Commission will provide input on land title, ownership and boundary issues, surveying and mapping, and land and resource management. The agencies will collectively provide input on environmental and cultural impacts, goals, feasibility, costs, and scope.

AB 1680 is supported by Azul and State Controller Betty Yee. There is no known opposition. In May, the Assembly approved AB 1680 on a bipartisan 67-1 vote and is pending in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the Commission support AB 1680 (Limón) to require the California Coastal Commission, in collaboration with the California State Coastal Conservancy, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the State Lands Commission to develop a new coastal access plan for Hollister Ranch.