



City Council Agenda Item

City Council Meeting Date: January 7, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Jim Throop, City Manager
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SUBJECT: Council Request – Review of Letters to be sent to Santa Barbara County Requesting Access to Estuary, and to the California Department of Fish & Wildlife for Modification to the Vandenberg Marine Preserve

Recommendation:

Staff recommends the City Council:

- 1) Review and approve letters written for City Manager's signature to the Santa Barbara County (County) Parks Director for access to the Santa Ynez Estuary, and to the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (Fish & Wildlife) for modification to the Vandenberg Marine Preserve to allow surf fishing at Surf Beach (attached); or
- 2) Provide other direction to staff.

Background:

The City Council requested, on September 3, 2019, to review the two letters that are to be sent to the County and Fish & Wildlife in regards to estuary access and a modification to the Vandenberg Marine Preserve that would again allow fishing from the beach at Surf Beach, respectively.

Discussion:

In 1999/2000, the Federal Fish & Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, and California Coastal Commission implemented a restrictive use policy for Surf Beach, with the intent to protect the endangered Western Snowy Plover bird.

This change in use for the beach, the only public-access beach close to the City, essentially closed all access to the beach during the prime summer months, due to the nesting season of the Snowy Plover.

These restrictions have had many negative impacts on the City. People using the beach for subsistence fishing could no longer do it during the closed times. Tourism suffered as people

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could no longer stay in Lompoc and easily travel to a beach. Individuals with limited incomes could not use a natural resource for physical activities or just pure enjoyment of sitting on the beach.

On May 9, 2019, the City sent a letter to the California Coastal Commission during its five-year review of the Vandenberg Air Force Base (VAFB) environmental review, requesting that these restrictions be removed.

Due to the City's request, VAFB, California Coastal Commission, Federal Fish & Wildlife, State Fish & Wildlife, County, and the City attended a meeting at Surf Beach to physically walk the restricted areas and discuss possible solutions to allow access to the beach year-round.

The outcome of the meeting was very successful with all of the regulatory agencies agreeing to recommend the beach stay open year-round, even if there are 50 or more violations (entering of nesting areas).

The final approval came at the California Coastal Commission meeting on Friday, December 13, 2019, during which the Commission voted unanimously to approve the new guidelines for Surf Beach. These new guidelines allow the beach to remain open all year, but VAFB will continue to monitor and track the number of violations. Should there be any kind of egregious act against the nesting birds, then VAFB has the ability to once again close off the beach.

Fiscal Impact:

There is no actual cost for the review of the letters. Should the City be successful in both the estuary access and the allowing of surf fishing, these changes do have the potential to increase tourism in the area, and as such would be a revenue enhancement for the City.

Conclusion:

This agenda item was due to a City Council request to review the letters being prepared to be sent to the Santa Barbara County and State Department of Fish & Wildlife requesting installation of an access point in the estuary, and for a modification to the Vandenberg Marine Preserve to allow fishing from the beach.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Throop, City Manager

Attachments:

- 1) Letter to Santa Barbara County, Santa Ynez River Estuary Access at Ocean Park
- 2) Letter to California Department of Fish & Wildlife, Surf Fishing at Surf Beach