



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 8/30/2022

File #: 22-1048

To: Board of Supervisors

From: County Administrative Office

Agenda Section: Consent

SUBJECT:

Installation of an Americans with Disabilities Act Accessible Beach Access Mat at Clam Beach

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Approve the proposed installation of an Americans with Disabilities Act accessible beach access mat at Clam Beach.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

ADA Internal Service Fund (3552)

DISCUSSION:

On Sept. 7, 2016, the County of Humboldt entered into a consent decree with the United States Department of Justice that required the commencement of the Humboldt County Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Project. The purpose of the Humboldt County ADA Compliance Project is to bring all county-owned and leased facilities that provide programs, services, and activities to the public into compliance with the ADA.

Clam Beach County Park was one of the facilities listed in the consent decree as having barriers to access as defined under the ADA. In 2019, the two restrooms at Clam Beach County Park were replaced with accessible facilities, accessible campsites were developed within the campground and accessible routes were developed within the two parking areas. Also in 2019, the County Administrative Office's ADA Compliance Team began working with the Parks Division of the Public Works Department (County Parks) to create an accessible path between one of the parking areas and the beach and a program to make beach wheelchairs available to the public.

The ADA Compliance Team applied for and received grant funding from the State Coastal Conservancy to purchase a beach wheelchair for the use of patrons on a reservation basis. However, staff discovered that the Beach Wheelchairs were not easily maneuvered through the fine soft sand at Clam Beach and additional accessible features would be required to provide an accessible route to the beach.

The ADA Compliance Team and County Parks recommend installing a 5-foot-wide polyester mat along the beach access corridor that starts at the northern parking lot of Clam Beach County Park to enable individuals with mobility disabilities to travel from the site arrival point to the edge of the beach (Attachment 1). A path of bare sand at least 5 feet wide would be maintained next to the proposed mat. Horses and emergency vehicles would be able to cross and travel over the mat. The mat would be placed as a series of removable and adjustable segments; ongoing adjustment and maintenance of the mat would be needed to account for high tides and blowing sand. The mats are designed to be used by beach wheelchairs and will also benefit people who prefer a firm and stable surface. After the mat is installed, County Parks will make beach wheelchairs available for check-out by reservation on the county website at no charge. Exhibits depicting the proposed beach access mat are provided in Attachment 2.

The county maintains that a removable and adjustable access mat is preferred over a fixed structure such as a boardwalk to reduce environmental and aesthetic impacts and to provide more flexibility for adjustment in response to changing conditions. Similar beach access mats have been installed at Muir Beach and Stinson Beach within Golden Gate National Recreational Area and several beaches in southern California. Development of the accessible route at the northern parking lot is preferred because it does not involve a creek crossing, in contrast to the southern parking lot, which involves a crossing over Patrick Creek and through the adjacent riparian area. Currently, beach access at the southern parking lot is provided by a modest boardwalk structure that crosses Patrick Creek and the adjacent wetlands. However, upgrading and maintaining this boardwalk to ADA standards is not recommended due to cost, permitting complexity and environmental impacts.

On Jan. 4, 2022, your Board authorized the Public Works Director to execute a Memorandum of Understanding with California State Parks, which authorized the county to place a portion of the beach access mat on Little River State Beach, because the beach access route at the northern parking lot would cross state property (Attachment 3). In addition, the Board requested that staff seek additional input from community stakeholders and user groups active at Clam Beach and return to the Board for approval of installation of the beach mat.

On Feb. 17 and 18, 2022, the county held two onsite outreach meetings and invited law enforcement, equestrian groups, disabled access groups and other community stakeholders to view a section of the proposed mat and provide feedback. A summary of comments received at these meetings is provided in Attachment 4. The majority of the opinions shared were positive. The mat is designed to withstand the weight of a vehicle or a horse without being damaged. A horse walking on the mat was demonstrated during the public meetings. Some horses will have no problem walking on the mat, while others may be hesitant. Maintaining a 5-foot-wide sand path adjacent to the mat will help ensure that equestrians can continue to access the beach at the northern parking lot. Law enforcement representatives were supportive of the mat installation and did not have concerns with accessing the beach by driving on the mat after installation. As part of product testing, County Parks staff drove a county truck onto a rolled-out section of the mat and it performed well and the mat was not damaged as a result. County Parks staff are in support of the mat and felt that they could easily remove sections of the mat to maneuver large vehicles and heavy equipment on to the beach if needed.

On June 3, 2022, based on the feedback and comments received from the February public meetings the county issued a press release and made social media posts inviting the public to review a set of revised exhibits and drawings that were posted on the County website and social media outlets and offered the public a period to provide comments until June 17, 2022. A summary of the comments received is provided in Attachment 5.

The beach mat will have no effect on western snowy plovers, a beach-nesting bird listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act, because the mat will be placed in a corridor that is currently heavily used by the public. From 2001 through 2021, plovers have not initiated nests within the access corridor (Attachment 6). If the beach mat is installed during the nesting season, a qualified biologist will be present to ensure that plover nests are not impacted. Public Works contacted the United States Fish and Wildlife Service via telephone to describe the proposed action and they concurred that the proposed beach mat will have no effect on snowy plovers.

Staff believe that the proposed installation of the beach access mat at Clam Beach is compatible with existing uses. Accordingly, staff recommends that the Board approve the proposed installation of the beach access mat. Upon Board approval, staff will resubmit the project revisions to the California Coastal Commission for approval. A *de minimis* coastal development permit waiver is anticipated.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The estimated cost to purchase and install the accessible beach access mat at Clam Beach County Park is approximately 35,000. The ADA Compliance budget (3552-152) purchased the mat in fiscal year 2021-2022 and anticipates minor installation expenses in the current fiscal year. There are sufficient funds budgeted in the current fiscal year to cover the anticipated additional expenses.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

The recommended actions support the Board of Supervisors' Strategic Framework by providing for and maintaining infrastructure.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

California State Parks

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board may choose not to approve the proposed installation of an ADA accessible beach access mat at Clam Beach. However, this alternative is not recommended because beach access was identified as an access barrier by the United States Department of Justice in the 2016 Consent Decree.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 - Site Map
- Attachment 2 - Exhibits Depicting the Beach Access Mat
- Attachment 3 - Memorandum of Understanding with California State Parks
- Attachment 4 - Summary of Public Comments from February 17-18, 2022, Meetings
- Attachment 5 - Summary of Public Comments from June 2022
- Attachment 6 - Western Snowy Plover Nesting Sites, 2001-2021

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PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Board Order No.: D-8

Meeting of: Jan. 4, 2022

File No.: 21-1692