

Coast 4U Quarterly
Spring 2010 Issue

Q& A with Peter Douglas, Executive Director at the California Coastal Commission

Each issue of Coast 4 U Quarterly features an interview with an employee of the California Coastal Commission. Our premier issue features Peter Douglas, Executive Director at the California Coastal Commission since 1985. Read on as Peter Douglas discusses the history and importance of this coastal legal authority, and the successes his career as seen.

C4UQ: *Why was the California Coastal Commission created?*

PD: *The Coastal Commission was established in 1972 by voter initiative after several attempts to pass a coastal protection law in the Legislature failed. It was created as a temporary agency to protect the coast against rampant, haphazard development, while a long range protection plan was being prepared by the Commission. The California Coastal Plan was completed in 1975 and submitted to the Legislature for implementation. In 1976, the Coastal Act made the Commission permanent and established strong land and water use policies to protect public access and recreation opportunities, sensitive habitats, scenic resources, agriculture, marine resources, and commercial fishing.*

C4UQ: *Why is it important?*

PD: *The coast is California's geographic soul; a most precious natural resource that the public demands be protected forever for the benefit of current and future generations. It was being destroyed piecemeal by poorly planned development. The threat of turning our coast into a Miami-West was real and the public said "No, we don't want that!" The Coastal Act is the law that protects this vital public treasure.*

C4UQ: *What do you like most about your job?*

PD: *The wonderful dedicated, skilled and highly motivated people on staff who I have the privilege to work with.*

C4UQ: *What successes or decisions are you most proud of?*

PD: *The accomplishment of which I am most proud is the culture of humanism, resolve in the cause of environmental conservation, dedication to public service, creativity, integrity and professionalism we have established at the Commission.*

Our biggest accomplishments are the things you can't measure and do NOT see on the coast – the public access NOT lost, the destructive development that did NOT occur, the scenic resources that have NOT been spoiled, the wetlands that have NOT been filled, and more. Specifically, our strongest accomplishments include the Malibu local coastal plan in which the Commission established the highest protection for environmentally sensitive habitat areas in the Santa Monica Mountains on a landscape wide basis, the denial of a massive new resort on the Hearst Ranch in San Luis Obispo County, the empowerment of coastal protection activists, the total shutdown of speculative second home subdivisions along the entire coast, and saving a State Park by denying a toll road through the middle of it.

C4UQ: *What are some challenges you've encountered in your position over the years?*

PD: *My "job" is really a labor of love. The greatest challenge I have faced is sustaining, over time, staff morale in the face of six governors who have been hostile to the Commission, never having adequate resources with which to do our work, and ongoing budget and staffing cuts.*

C4UQ: *What is your favorite beach?*

PD: *That's for me to know and you to find out by finding your own favorite beach.*

Many thanks to Peter Douglas for his lifetime of commitment to preserving California's coastal resources and natural beauty.