

CHAPTER 11: COMMERCIAL FISHING AND RECREATIONAL BOATING

A. Policy Framework

The Coastal Act states that the economic, commercial, and recreational importance of fishing activities shall be recognized and protected, and that facilities serving the commercial fishing and recreational boating industries shall be protected, and where feasible, upgraded. Recreational boating use is encouraged by providing for the development of berthing space, increasing facilities and limiting non-water-dependent uses. Existing space shall not be reduced unless demand no longer exists or substitute space has been provided. The needs of the commercial fishing industry have priority over recreational boating. Diking, filling, and dredging are allowed for the purposes of protecting commercial fishing facilities. Recreational boating facilities should be designed and sited not to interfere with the needs of the commercial fishing industry. Additionally, uses of the marine environment shall be carried out in a manner that will maintain healthy populations of all species of marine organisms.

The LCP states that commercial fishing and recreational boating shall be protected and, where feasible, upgraded, although commercial fishing shall remain a priority over recreational boating. Also, oceanfront development should give priority to boating facilities, as otherwise consistent with other policies of the Coastal Act. The LCP also sets priorities for uses within the San Luis Bay harbor area as follows: coastal-dependent (commercial fishing and mariculture/aquaculture, sport fishing, recreational boating and other oceanfront recreational uses, and energy-related facilities), coastal-related, and finally, other uses. The San Luis Bay Area Plan states that prior to any approval of any use which is not coastal-dependent, the harbor district shall make a finding that adequate resources and services have been reserved for all coastal dependent uses proposed in the master plan. The North Coast Area Plan contains a standard requiring that the San Simeon Harbor be limited to small-scale recreational boating.

B. Background

There are three harbors in San Luis Obispo County: San Luis Bay, Morro Bay, and San Simeon Bay. The two major activities at the harbors are commercial fishing and recreational boating. Each of the three harbors affords support to the commercial fishing industry; Port San Luis and Morro Bay harbors provide docking, mooring, and processing facilities, while San Simeon functions as a marginal shelter during adverse weather conditions. Commercial fishing is an important source of income for the county; in 1998, the commercial fishery landings at the three harbors were over 6 million pounds valued at \$6.4 million.¹ Around Morro Bay, fishing is an

¹ San Luis Obispo Council of Governments. *1999 Regional Profile*. October, 1999.

important industry, second only to tourism. Tourism, however, is dependent upon the commercial fishing industry in that tourists come to enjoy the fishing village ambiance provided there, as well as to participate in recreational boating.

Commercial fishing has long been an important component of the economy of the Central Coast; however, 1998 marks the fifth year of decreasing pounds of landings for San Luis Obispo County. Corresponding to this steady decrease, demand for commercial fishing facilities has declined in recent years and at the same time demand for recreational boating facilities has increased. Within Port San Luis, the number of moorings for commercial fishing boats has been steadily decreasing due to the lack of demand. In 1994, commercial fishing boats occupied 170 moorings; today there are only 128 moorings.² Because of the continuous need for recreational boating facilities in the Central Coast, these moorings are being converted to recreational boating use. Although Port San Luis once performed solely harbor enterprise functions, it now has expanded to provide many other types of public serving activities, including ancillary uses such as beach concessions, surfing and camping, restaurants, fresh and live fish sales, fuel and ice facilities, and boat yard repair facilities.

Historically, there has been a shortage of recreational boating facilities on the central coast, especially for slips and moorings. An early study by the California Department of Navigation and Oceanic Development indicated that statewide, the greatest need for berthing facilities was within San Luis Obispo County. The 1994 Port San Luis Master Plan noted the need to double the Port's ability to provide services for recreational boats.

Currently at Port San Luis there are 146 moorings for "pleasure" boats (sail and power boats) with a waiting list of 14. Demand for moorings is greater than is evidenced by the current waiting list; prior to the implementation of a waiting list fee, the list contained more than 300 names. The LCP notes that providing dry storage and improving boat launch facilities will be the most feasible approach to help in alleviating boating demand.

At the time of the adoption of the Morro Bay State Park General Plan in 1988, the state park marina had 100 slips and the Plan proposed 25-50 additional ones. Currently the marina provides 115 recreational boat slips, with a waiting list of approximately 20. At the four other marinas in Morro Bay, there are a total of approximately 100 slips, also with waiting lists. There are between 100-200 moorings in the bay, some privately owned. There is a waiting list for the moorings available for lease. At San Simeon Harbor there is a pier for fishing, and moorings for commercial fishing boats.

In addition to the facilities listed above, there are three boat launch sites in the county, at Leffingwell Landing on the North Coast, Tidelands Park in Morro Bay and Morro Bay State Park. A fourth boat launch ramp for small shallow-draft boats previously existed in Baywood Park, but was essentially lost in association with a hotel expansion project approved by both the County and the Commission on appeal. The County Parks Department is currently in the process

² Port San Luis Harbor District. *Port Master Plan*. May, 1994.

of analyzing a replacement ramp at a nearby location that has been funded by the California Department of Boating and Waterways. As noted below, some concerns have been expressed that the new boat ramp might impact sensitive resources of Morro Bay.

C. Preliminary LCP Implementation Issues

Since LCP certification, the following preliminary implementation issues have been raised:

- The loss of a small boat launch ramp in Baywood Park, and the impact that a proposed replacement ramp may have on wetland resources, particularly sensitive waterfowl habitats;
- The potential impacts that increased recreational boating (e.g., kayaking) may be having on wetland and sand dune habitats Morro Bay that were previously isolated from human activities;
- The impacts that proposed visitor-serving and commercial development on an upland areas owned by the Port San Luis Harbor District might have on the provision of adequate boating and fishing facilities and other coastal resources; and,
- Reducing polluted runoff generated by boating activities and facilities.

Preliminary Policy Alternatives:

Preliminary Recommendation 11.1: Develop a Program to Educate Boaters on the Sensitive Habitat Values of Morro Bay and Other Aquatic Habitats.

The LCP could include a program that encourages new and existing facilities that serve the boating community to develop and distribute literature, and provide interpretive signs, that inform and encourage boaters to protect sensitive habitat areas and minimize pollution.

Preliminary Recommendation 11.2: Coordinate the Review of the Proposed Boat Launch Ramp in Baywood Park with Commission Staff, the Department of Fish and Game, and other involved regulatory Agencies and Interested Individuals

As the design and environmental analysis of the proposed boat launch ramp progresses, continued coordination with Commission staff, as well as with biological experts and other regulatory agencies and interested parties, should be pursued.

Preliminary Recommendation 11.3: Update the Port San Luis Master Plan and Associated Sections of the San Luis Bay Area Plan

Recognizing that circumstances regarding the operation, maintenance, and financing of Port San Luis Harbor facilities have changed since the relevant sections of the LCP were certified, a comprehensive update of the Port San Luis Master Plan and associated LCP provisions is in order. Given the wide range of coastal resource issues raised by future development of uplands

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owned by the Port San Luis Harbor District, this update should be closely coordinated with Commission and County staff.