

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## BACKGROUND TO THE REGIONAL CUMULATIVE ASSESSMENT PROJECT

This project is the California Coastal Commission's second Regional Cumulative Assessment Project (**ReCAP**) and focuses on the Santa Monica Mountains/Malibu area. The Regional Cumulative Assessment Projects evaluate, on a regional basis, the implementation of California's Coastal Management Program (CCMP) and its effectiveness in managing cumulative impacts to key coastal resources. The evaluation includes review and analysis of the implementation of both the Commission's program and procedures and those of local government's with certified Local Coastal Programs (LCPs).

*Cumulative Impacts* are the combined effects of a series of development activities or natural effects. Although an individual project may not greatly affect the natural or human environment, the cumulative impacts created by many different projects over time may significantly alter these environments. For example, the conversion of coastal habitat to developed land from an individual project may not seem that significant. However, multiple development projects may collectively degrade important habitat values.

The ReCAP process is designed to improve the management of the cumulative impacts of coastal development and to help keep programs and policies effective and up to date. The direction to conduct a ReCAP review is based, in part, on the Commission's mandate to periodically review the implementation of Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) pursuant to Section 30519.5 of the Coastal Act. The ReCAP process focuses on 1) identifying priority coastal resource issues; 2) identifying what impacts to these resources (both positive and negative) have occurred as a result of development; 3) evaluating the factors contributing to these impacts, including actions authorized under the CCMP; and 4) developing and implementing recommendations to respond to the impacts identified. This current ReCAP is also intended to develop a compendium of information to assist both Los Angeles County and the City of Malibu in completing their LCPs.

The Commission's first ReCAP was undertaken as a pilot project in the Santa Cruz/Monterey Bay area in 1995, with federal funding provided by the 1990 amendments to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The Monterey Bay ReCAP resulted in numerous program improvements implemented through Commission action on permits, local government LCP amendments and modifications to the Commission's management program. From this first pilot project, Commission staff also developed a basic methodology for use in undertaking additional ReCAPs in other areas of the coastal zone. This methodology is detailed in the *Procedural Guidance Manual for Conducting Regional Periodic Reviews* (January 1997).

As indicated in this report, the CCMP has accomplished much in mitigating cumulative impacts through its review of specific development projects. Periodic reviews offer yet another opportunity to further address the cumulative impacts of combined projects over time. Regional reviews and the data collection that results can help coastal managers: 1) improve review of specific development proposals; 2) link individual sites and development proposals to the larger regional resource trends; 3) develop additional policy and intergovernmental tools to address cumulative and secondary impacts; and 5) help develop programs that manage coastal resources in the most effective manner possible.

## THE SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS/MALIBU ReCAP

The Santa Monica Mountains/Malibu ReCAP study area extends from near Point Mugu in Ventura County to Topanga Canyon in Los Angeles County. The coastal zone forms the northern (inland) boundary (see Figure 2-1). Rugged terrain, sensitive resources, and existing patterns of land division combine to make planning for growth and managing cumulative impacts in the region challenging.

Within this area, only the County of Ventura has a certified LCP. The County of Ventura has been issuing coastal permits for its jurisdiction since 1983. The Commission certified a Land Use Plan (LUP) portion of the LCP for the Los Angeles County portion of this ReCAP area in 1986; however, the implementation portion of the LCP was never completed, and thus the authority to issue coastal development permits was never transferred.

Coastal resource planning and management was affected by the incorporation of the City of Malibu in 1991, which created a new jurisdiction that did not exist at the time of the preparation of the Los Angeles County LUP. The City of Malibu has not yet completed an LCP for their jurisdiction and the previously approved L.A. County LUP has not yet been updated to reflect the changed circumstances. Therefore, for most of the ReCAP area, the Commission retains permit authority. The ReCAP effort is timely in this region because both L.A. County and the City of Malibu are gearing up to complete their LCPs. The Commission recently awarded a planning grant to the County of Los Angeles to assist

Under California's Coastal Management Program, local governments are required to develop local coastal programs (LCPs) that include land use policies consistent with the policies of the Coastal Act and implementing zoning ordinances. Once developed, these plans are reviewed and certified by the Coastal Commission. After an LCP is certified, most general permitting authority is returned to the local government, with the Commission retaining jurisdiction over some permits and hearing appeals from local decisions. LCPs can be completed in phases and a land use plan (LUP) is the first phase of a full LCP. However, until a complete LCP is certified, and the local government assumes coastal permit authority, the LUP is only guidance and Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act remains the standard of review for the Commission in permit actions.

them in that effort. A grant application for the City of Malibu is pending before the Commission.

## THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT ISSUES

In July 1997, the Commission identified the following key issues for the focus of ReCAP, recognizing that budget and staffing constraints precluded evaluation of every potential resource issue in the region:

- Cumulative impacts on resources from the concentration and location of development patterns, including some impacts to environmentally sensitive habitats and an analysis of the Commission's actions through the Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) program;
- Impacts on resources from shoreline armoring;
- Impacts to coastal access, both inland and along the shoreline, from overall development in the region; and
- Consideration of enforcement issues as part of the evaluation for these issues.

**Coastal Access** in general terms refers to the ability of the public to reach, use or view the shoreline of coastal waters or inland coastal recreation areas and trails.

Selection of these issues was based on information from a variety of sources. The Commission's *Review of the Malibu/Santa Monica Mountains Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) Program, April 1996*, raised a number of issues resulting from two public workshops on the operation of the Commission's TDC program. In that report, staff noted that there were a number of areas where additional evaluation, data collection and other planning studies would be needed to consider possible revisions to the TDC program. ReCAP's evaluation of the TDC program is intended to address some of the issues raised in the 1996 report.

Public access to the shoreline has historically been a critical, if controversial, issue in the Malibu area. The continuing conflicts in protecting and providing maximum public access along the shoreline evidenced in the Commission's regulatory reviews provided impetus for examination of the cumulative effects of development on public access as well as the impacts of shoreline structures on public access.

The issue selection was also based on results of a workshop held June 5, 1997, with local government and public agencies, Commission staff's knowledge of the issues, and comments made at the Commission's public hearing on the issue selection. Staff believes this ReCAP project builds on the preceding efforts to examine coastal resource issues in the Santa Monica Mountains/Malibu area.

The data used in this project came from a variety of sources, with the major sources being Commission and local government permit actions. The report evaluates data from 1978 through 1996. As a critical component in evaluating cumulative impacts of development including the TDC program, Commission staff developed a Geographic Information

System (GIS) for the project area, comprised of data layers derived from Commission data and layers obtained from other local and regional sources, including the National Park Service. This GIS allows the Commission staff to undertake spatial analysis of permit data at a level not previously possible and facilitates the sharing of coastal permit data among local and regional agencies. It is expected that many of the data layers derived from Commission data can be used by local government in their LCP planning, since both L.A. and Ventura Counties and the City of Malibu have GIS capabilities.

## **THE ReCAP REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This document contains the results of the ReCAP's assessment of cumulative impacts and recommendations to improve coastal policies and procedures to address these impacts. After several public hearings and a public comment period, the Commission adopted this report and recommendations as part of an Action Plan in June, 1999.

The report begins with an overview of the ReCAP project area and summary of development activity that has occurred since 1978. This is followed by a spatial analysis of development patterns and scenarios describing the potential for additional growth. Recommendations on how to improve the Commission's procedures and local government's procedures to manage ongoing development in the region are presented. Analysis of coastal access and of shoreline armoring follow the development section.

The report and adopted Action Plan include *different types* of recommendations including:

- changes the Commission can implement immediately through modifications in its own permit actions or procedures;
- recommendations to Ventura County for incorporation into its certified LCP;
- suggestions for Los Angeles County and the City of Malibu to assist with completion of their LCPs;
- recommended actions for other government agencies which may be addressed through intergovernmental coordination activities; and
- longer-term recommendations which may require additional funding, additional staff, or legislative authorization.

## **A NOTE ON THE DATA**

Reviewing almost twenty years of Commission actions was a challenging task, especially when the Commission, until the last few years, lacked any means to systematically store and retrieve data electronically. For its analysis, ReCAP staff relied primarily on 1) the Commission's written staff reports and findings, and 2) the Commission's written logs of permit actions. These sources comprised the most accessible sources of data. However, ReCAP staff found that there was no easy or consistent way within the scope and

resources of the project to document whether Commission approved permits had actually been issued and the applicable project built. As a result, the ReCAP database tracks only Commission *actions*. Where possible, other sources of data were used to try to determine whether a project was actually constructed. Discussions of the data sources, the assumptions staff relied upon and the limitations of the data are discussed both in the report and in the technical appendix.