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TO ALL MEDIA

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COASTAL COMMISSION APPROVES PLAN TO RESTORE PUBLIC ACCESS TO ONTARIO RIDGE -- TRAIL TO BE FULLY OPEN IN TEN DAYS

San Luis Obispo – The Coastal Commission has approved a final plan to restore public access to a popular hiking trail near Avila Beach in San Luis Obispo County. The plan provides details about how the property owner must remove barbed wire and other fencing, gates and “No Trespassing” signs that were placed along the heavily used Ontario Ridge Trail that leads from the City of Pismo Beach to Pirates Cove just south of Avila Beach in San Luis Obispo County.

At its July meeting, the Commission ordered Robert and Judy McCarthy of Bakersfield to remove the unpermitted fencing and signs, but required them to first prepare a plan that would spell out exactly how that would be accomplished. The McCarthys worked with Coastal Commission staff to prepare a plan that would expedite the restoration of access, while minimizing any harm to the environment or the trails.

The plan, approved by Commission Executive Director Charles Lester on October 7, requires the unpermitted development to be completely removed within 10 days of plan approval.

“We are pleased that the McCarthys have followed the Commission’s order to remove the fences and restore the historic public use of this property quickly and completely” said Lester. “The public, including many local residents, are looking forward to returning to this fantastic stretch of coast.”

Shortly after the Order was issued in this case, the Commission became able to issue fines for any Coastal Act violation that interferes with public access. The Commission informed the McCarthys that if they did not comply with the Order, fines would be pursued in this case. Chief of Enforcement, Lisa Haage, believes that the potential to levy fines has contributed to the speedy resolution. “We believe that property owners become a lot more cooperative when they know they might have to pay fines for not complying with the Coastal Act” said Haage. “The threat of daily fines accruing provides a strong incentive to resolve a problem, and to resolve it more quickly, rather than argue about it for years on end. And most important, it can help us protect and more quickly restore public access to the magnificent coast of California.”

By October 17, 2014, the McCarthys have agreed to:

- Remove all unpermitted fences, signs, gates, gateposts and footings;
- Restore all areas impacted by unpermitted development and the removal of unpermitted development;
- Revegetate, with native plants, areas which have been disturbed by unpermitted development or the removal of unpermitted development.

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