

The coast belongs to everybody.

—PETER DOUGLASS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION, 1985-2011



Coastal Access and Protection Act of 2017

AB 1129 (STONE)

Protections for the iconic California coast have been in place for over forty years, yet the struggle to preserve its natural grandeur and provide access to all continues today. As the state's beaches become increasingly eroded due to rising sea levels, property owners along the coastline are building barriers to protect their real estate. These attempts to buffer private development from storms and erosion restrict public access and diminish our beaches even further. The Coastal Access and Protection Act of 2017, AB 1129 (Stone, D-Monterey Bay) helps prepare our coast for the impacts of climate change, and preserves public access to the beach and other natural areas. It also provides clear direction and enhanced authority to the California Coastal Commission to minimize the use of armoring because of its adverse impacts on coastal ecosystems and public access.



The Challenge

Much of California's coast has been armored with seawalls and other coastal defense structures, which are a temporary fix for the long-term effects of a changing shoreline. The California Coastal Act of 1976 created policy that allowed armoring to protect existing development but also required that new development minimize adverse impacts and be sited and designed for stability to avoid future construction that would alter natural bluffs and cliffs. Even so, many armoring structures are built under emergency conditions with little substantive review or analysis of the impacts they will have on the beach, its ecosystem, public access or neighboring properties. Once installed, these structures are rarely removed and have permanent impacts, preventing coastal ecosystems from migrating inland and cutting off sand supply, causing beaches to narrow and eventually disappear.

What's at Stake?

Coastal armoring degrades and even eliminates eroding beaches and other coastal habitats. The biggest loss is to the public; California beaches provide recreation opportunities for residents across the state, as well as visitors from around the world. Research shows 77 percent of Californians visit the beach at least once a year, and many visit more often. All of California's diverse demographic groups—people among different age, income, and ethnic groups—come to the beach to relax and enjoy the scenery, give their children a place to play and connect with nature. The annual, \$46 billion coastal economy is based upon the maintenance of natural areas, beaches and parks as tourist destinations, and their economic benefit to the state depends on protection of scenic and recreational values.

The Opportunity

The Coastal Access and Protection Act of 2017 (AB 1129) will protect coastal ecosystems and public access by clarifying the California Coastal Commission's authority to limit shoreline armoring.

Specifically, the bill will:

- Amend the California Coastal Act to clarify that structures built after January 1, 1977 are not "existing" under the terms of the Act, and are therefore not entitled to a seawall permit, except if all the other policies of the Act are met. The original grandfathering of development in existence in 1976 would not be changed.
- Give the Coastal Commission the authority to levy administrative, monetary penalties against the property owner for every day an illegal structure is maintained.
- Limit emergency seawalls to temporary structures, with the minimum impacts needed to abate the threat, and require removal of emergency armoring structures in the absence of longer-term authorization.

Nature-based alternatives to armoring that use natural features and processes to protect property have been shown to cost less or about the same as armoring. Defending our beaches from unnecessary seawalls will restore and enhance the natural character of the coast and make sure California's beaches remain open to all, now and in the future.

