

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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Protecting Pleasure Point



A soil nail wall consisting of shotcrete or gunite textured and colored to match the natural rock was used to stabilize the cliffs along Pleasure Point.

The ongoing retreat of the bluffs at Pleasure Point and the closure of one lane of traffic, threats to the water and sewer line beneath the roadway, increasingly unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicycles, as well as the desire to improve public access, all led the County Redevelopment Agency to look at options for stabilizing this stretch of coastline about eight years ago.

The project planning, engineering, environmental assessment and review, public input and meetings, and Coastal Commission review and hearings stretched out over five or six years. In this location, there were essentially only two options: try to stabilize the bluff to slow or halt the erosion, or do nothing and let the retreat continue. The Environmental Impact Report or EIR had to look at several different

protection options as well as the no project approach. If nothing were done in this area, where erosion proceeds at about a foot per year on average, it would only be a matter of time before more bluff collapsed, the roadway and walkway were undermined and ultimately closed, and the utility lines broken. Moving the water and sewer lines back to Portola Drive was an expensive proposition and a factor that had to be carefully weighed.

Options for protection included armoring only the base of the bluff, only the upper portion of the bluff, or armoring the entire bluff from top to bottom. Groins were also considered as a way to trap littoral drift and form a protective beach. While a wider beach had clear benefits, the accumulating sand would cover a portion of the rocky intertidal zone, which has some biological impacts. Although a wider beach would reduce wave activity at the base of the bluff, the beach would likely narrow or disappear altogether during the winter months, which would reduce the needed protection when it was needed most.

The County Redevelopment Agency and Department of Public Works held a number of meetings where all those interested had the opportunity to look at the designs being considered and their environmental impacts, ask questions of the staff, the consulting geologists and engineers, and provide input. The surfing community and the residents of the Pleasure Point area were very involved in the process. The EIR was written and revised several times in response to questions raised by the public and by Coastal Commission staff.

While the Coastal Commission today is not generally in favor of additional coastal armor, the perceived bluff-top public benefits of the project, including better pedestrian and bicycle access, improved parking, and maintaining East Cliff Drive for vehicles, were all seen as positive elements. The protection and enhancement of public coastal access, including new and replacement coastal access stairs were additional benefits. The proposed design, a soil-nail wall constructed to look as much as possible like the actual bluff materials, was also a major improvement over many of the existing concrete seawalls and rip-rap along East Cliff Drive.

This site, for all of the reasons discussed in earlier columns, was a challenge from beginning to end, with many different groups and individuals understandably interested, concerned and involved. From my own experience in similar projects of this sort, I believe it is a very successful example of what can happen when the public agency is open with their plans and intent, that the public takes the time to get involved, attend meetings, listen and speak, and all parties remain open-minded and willing to compromise.