

# **TOPANGA LAGOON RESTORATION PURPOSE AND NEED PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER MEETING**

The Topanga Lagoon Restoration Project offers an exciting opportunity to protect and enhance this unique site. While the lagoon is currently some ecological functions we can improve on current conditions by developing an integrated plan that balances ecological function, visitor serving/recreation and emergency access elements. The existing conditions are deteriorating, out of compliance with numerous health and building standards, and in the case of the lifeguard headquarters literally falling into the sea. Actively anticipating and preparing for increasing impacts from coastal erosion and sea level rise provides the opportunity to develop a proactive, thoughtful and coordinated model for coastal preservation and protection.

## **Need for the Project:**

Topanga Lagoon and the adjacent area is experiencing continued degradation due to:

- coastal erosion during storms and king tides undermining the county lifeguard headquarters and restrooms
- retreating beach front leaving limited “towel space” during high tides
- constricted lagoon habitat (less than 1 acre of historic 30 acres)
- reduced biodiversity due to habitat limitations and invasive species
- declining population of federally endangered steelhead trout
- limited fish passage opportunities due to velocities associated with short 82’ PCH bridge span
- sub-standard septic systems for the existing concessions and ranger residence
- no overnight accommodations as the Topanga Ranch Motel deteriorates
- limited pedestrian beach access from the north side of PCH
- no trails or interpretive information regarding the archaeological, cultural and historic stories
- no coordinated visitor serving and recreation plan
- emergency access limitations for helicopters and ambulances, lifeguards and rangers

## **Purpose of the Project:**

The overarching goal of the Topanga Lagoon Restoration Project is to protect and restore, then maintain via adaptive management, the Topanga Lagoon ecosystem and the adjacent uplands, integrating public access, recreation, and visitor serving needs while protecting important archaeological and cultural resources. Avoiding direct impacts to sensitive biological, archeological/cultural and lagoon mouth/beach resources during the construction of the restoration has also been an overarching guiding principle. These two goals can be further refined into five categories of objectives:

1. Physical restoration of bar-built lagoon hydrologic functions while maintaining the natural pattern of lagoon mouth breaching without impacting the surf break
2. Biological restoration of habitat and species within the project area while maintaining and enhancing existing endangered fish habitat
3. Preservation of important archaeological, historic, and cultural resources while expanding interpretive information
4. Integration of public access, emergency, and visitor services
5. Management and maintenance to ensure long-term viability of the restoration efforts

The purpose and need evolved following input from the February 2020 Public Stakeholder meeting, with additional constraints identified by resource and permitting agencies. Over 150 individuals and agencies identified the following priorities:

- Restore Topanga Lagoon to the greatest extent possible.
- Improve ecological function of the lagoon by maintaining/improving tidewater goby habitat, improving fish passage for steelhead, protecting nesting and beach habitat, improving water quality and increasing wetland and transitional upland habitat.
- Anticipate and plan for resilience to sea level rise and coastal erosion.
- Move the lifeguard headquarters/restroom and helipad to better location.
- Avoid changing the surf break.
- Provide interpretation of the site history from Native Americans to present.
- Maintain some visitor serving services, including Wylie's Bait Shop and restaurants like Reel Inn, Cholada.
- Evaluate opportunity for historic Topanga Ranch Motel as overnight accommodation.
- Maintain traffic flow during construction.
- Preserve parking, especially no cost parking!
- Increase public transportation accessibility.

Each alternative emphasizes one or more of the priorities expressed. None of the alternatives proposes impacting the archaeological resources and all are designed to protect existing lagoon habitat for tidewater gobies. Natural breaching based on rainfall is also preserved. The fill on the west side of the lagoon will be removed and provide opportunity for implementing dune habitat and living shoreline protections.

Trail access and interpretive elements would be included in alternatives 2-4, along with pedestrian access under PCH on both the east and west sides of the lagoon. No parking on the bridge span shoulders will be permitted as per Caltrans regulations in any alternative but a short term parking area on the south side of the bridge could provide view access. Emergency access under PCH on the east side is included in all scenarios. The lifeguards and Fire Department have reviewed the proposed relocation sites and feel that all are feasible with the undergrounding of above ground utility wires. Existing limited Steelhead passage opportunities and Goby habitat are unchanged or improved.

Note that acreage restored calculations shown below are based on preliminary 30% alternative designs and are subject to change as we complete final 30% design.

**Alternative 1: No Project/Managed Decline (0 acres restored):** There would be no change to the lagoon footprint or habitat quality and no new bridge. The lifeguard headquarters will probably need to relocate due to undermining from coastal erosion and sea level rise. The Topanga Ranch Motel may or may not be restored to operational but existing non-conforming concessions and septic systems may be restricted. No improvements to habitat would occur. Sea level rise will continue to reduce beach area and threaten PCH.

**Alternative 2: (9.5 wetted acres, 11.7 acres restored):** This alternative provides the maximum amount of lagoon, wetland, riparian and transitional habitat, but completely removes the historic Topanga Ranch Motel and other visitor services from the project area. The dendritic channel pattern is based on conditions in 1924 before the lagoon was filled in. This alternative includes restoration of side channels of different elevations on the west side that are based on the historic configuration of the lagoon and would accommodate changing sea level and storm surge conditions. Partial or full relocation or replacement of public parking, concessions and overnight

accommodations along west side of Topanga Canyon Blvd in the project area may be an option. The lifeguard headquarters and helipad would be closer to the realigned access road that will have handicapped parking on a lower level, with additional parking on the upper level.

**Alternative 3: (7.1 wetted acres, 9.8 acres restored):** This alternative preserves much of the Topanga Ranch Motel in its historic configuration and allows for remodel and continued operation of a restaurant (current Reel Inn), while also providing expanded lagoon, wetland, riparian and transitional habitat mostly to the west. No other concessions would remain in that area. Partial or full relocation or replacement of public parking, concessions and overnight accommodations along the west side of Topanga Canyon Blvd. in the project study area may be an option. The lifeguard headquarters would move slightly east, and the helipad would be on the same level as PCH and the parking lot.

**Alternative 4: (7.1 wetted acres, 10.8 acres restored):** The alignment of PCH would move north allowing for the maximum amount of beach area. A portion of the historic Topanga Ranch Motel is retained with parking adjusted and allows for remodel and continued operation of a restaurant (currently Reel Inn), while also providing expanded lagoon, wetland, riparian and transitional habitat mostly to the west. No other concessions remain and parking locations shift. Partial or full relocation of public parking, concessions and overnight accommodations along the west side of Topanga Canyon Blvd. in the project area may be an option. The helipad and lifeguard headquarters are not as closely sited. This alternative maximizes managed retreat and provides the most sea level rise resilience.

#### **TIMELINE and NEXT STEPS**

Fall 2021 Public Meeting and review

February 2022 Phase 1 Project 30% Conceptual Designs completed

Phase 2 Topanga Lagoon Restoration Planning 2022-2025

Complete EIR/EIS, Coordinate with Caltrans

Complete Final Design and obtain required permits

Annual Public Meetings

Phase 2 Implementation/Construction 2026-?