

Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study



November 2013



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Trails Council

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SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Trails Council

November 26, 2013

Attn: Interested Parties
Subject: Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study

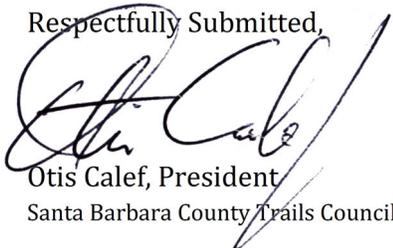
Dear Interested Parties:

The Santa Barbara County Trails Council (Trails Council) is pleased to present the Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study (Trail Study) for consideration by the community, Santa Barbara County staff and decision-makers, State agencies and our local representatives. The Trails Council hopes that the Trail Study provides useful information and recommendations for interested parties and stakeholders to consider as part of pending development projects and long range planning efforts on the Gaviota Coast. The Trails Council is committed to working with all parties in a cooperative manner to advance the planning for and development of the proposed Gaviota Coastal Trail and coastal access improvements set forth in the Trails Study. In particular, the Trails Council would like reviewers to consider the following:

- The Gaviota Coast is changing and such change will likely accelerate over the next 20-30 years as high end residential estate development transforms the coastal plain into an exclusive residential area.
- The currently pending development projects between Bacara Resort and Spa and El Capitan State Beach combined with the County's 2013 draft Gaviota Coast Plan offer a once in a generation possibility of protecting and improving access to and along this spectacular shoreline; if the community and public agencies hesitate, that opportunity may be lost forever.
- Obtaining funding for both construction and maintenance will be a concern; however, with a strong commitment from the community and cooperation from local and state agencies such funding can be secured from a range of sources.
- Realization of the Gaviota Coastal Trail and improved access will not occur over night; like all major trail projects, this is a project that will require 20 or more years of persistent measured effort; that effort begins in 2014!

We hope that the Trails Study objectively presents the challenges and benefits of realizing the Gaviota Coastal Trail and improved coastal access. We look forward to its successful completion for the benefit of County and State residents and visitors to our community.

Respectfully Submitted,



Otis Calef, President
Santa Barbara County Trails Council

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Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study

Prepared by the

Santa Barbara County Trails Council

We are grateful for funding provided by

UC Santa Barbara Associated Students
Coastal Fund



and local community members



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
Trails Council

Santa Barbara County Trails Council is a non-profit 501(c)(3) grassroots membership organization that supports nature-based recreation and access to the Santa Barbara County trail system for safe shared use by everyone.

To achieve our goals, we advocate for the acquisition and conservation of natural spaces in order to create opportunities for the expansion a county-wide network of multi-use trails for a broad range of recreational activities. We provide guidance and effective management for trail planning, construction and maintenance projects for local, state and federal government agencies. We also manage a year-round recreational hiking program and a volunteer supported trail maintenance program.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

%	percent
CCC	California Coastal Commission
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Coastal Trail	California Coastal Trail
CPUC	California Public Utilities Commission
CREF	Coastal Resource Enhancement Fund
CSP	California State Parks
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
ESH	Environmentally Sensitive Habitats
GMT	Gaviota Marine Terminal
IS	Initial Study
LCP	Local Coastal Plan
MND	Mitigated Negative Declaration
ROW	right-of-way
SBCAG	Santa Barbara County Association of Governments
State Parks	California Department of Parks and Recreation
SLO	San Luis Obispo
Trail Study	Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study
UC	University of California
UPRR	Union Pacific Railroad
US 101	US Highway 101

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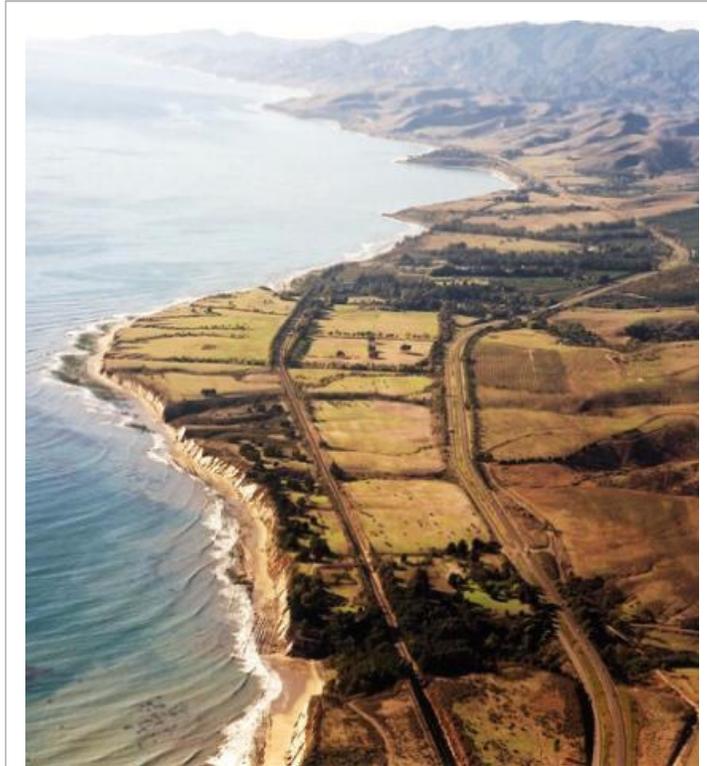
1.0 Introduction to the Gaviota Coast

The Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County is one of the largest remaining stretches of undeveloped coastline in southern California, with eastern Gaviota extending for 20 miles from the City of Goleta to Gaviota Pass (Figure 1-1). This scenic coast is enjoyed by more than 32,000 daily travelers on US Highway 101 (US 101), 560,000 annual visitors to three California State Parks and tens of thousands of beach goers who visit scenic beaches via informal coastal access trails. These visitors enjoy panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, Channel Islands National Park, undeveloped coastal bluffs, agricultural land, varied native habitats and the Santa Ynez Mountains.

Public recreational facilities along the eastern Gaviota Coast include El Capitan State Beach, Refugio State Beach and Gaviota State Park,

comprising more than 5,500 acres, 253 camp sites, and day use beach access for local residents, organized recreation (e.g., Junior Life Guards, YMCA Camps), and tourists. State Parks encompass approximately 11 miles of this shoreline, including a developed 4.5-mile reach of the California Coastal Trail (Coastal Trail) and many informal coastal access trails. However, these Parks are used to capacity; camping reservations are sold out months in advance for most of the year and parking areas often overflow on summer weekends.

The County's 1982 adopted Local Coastal Plan (LCP) recognizes the Gaviota Coast as a recreational resource of statewide importance; the National Park Service recognized its nationwide value in a National Seashore Feasibility Study in 2004. Key to recognizing the Gaviota Coast's statewide and national importance will be acquisition and development of improved coastal access, and an alignment of the planned Coastal Trail that closely follows the ocean along the shoreline. When combined with targeted acquisition of new parks, open space and foothill trails, these improvements will achieve the long-held community vision of the Gaviota Coast as a recreational resource of state and nationwide importance



The County of Santa Barbara's Gaviota Coast Plan should recognize the national and statewide importance of recreation along the Gaviota Coast, including creation of a world-class California Coastal Trail and access system. The broad coastal terrace at the east end of this Coast presents a unique opportunity for development of a scenic rural Coastal Trail and acquisition of public parks and open space.

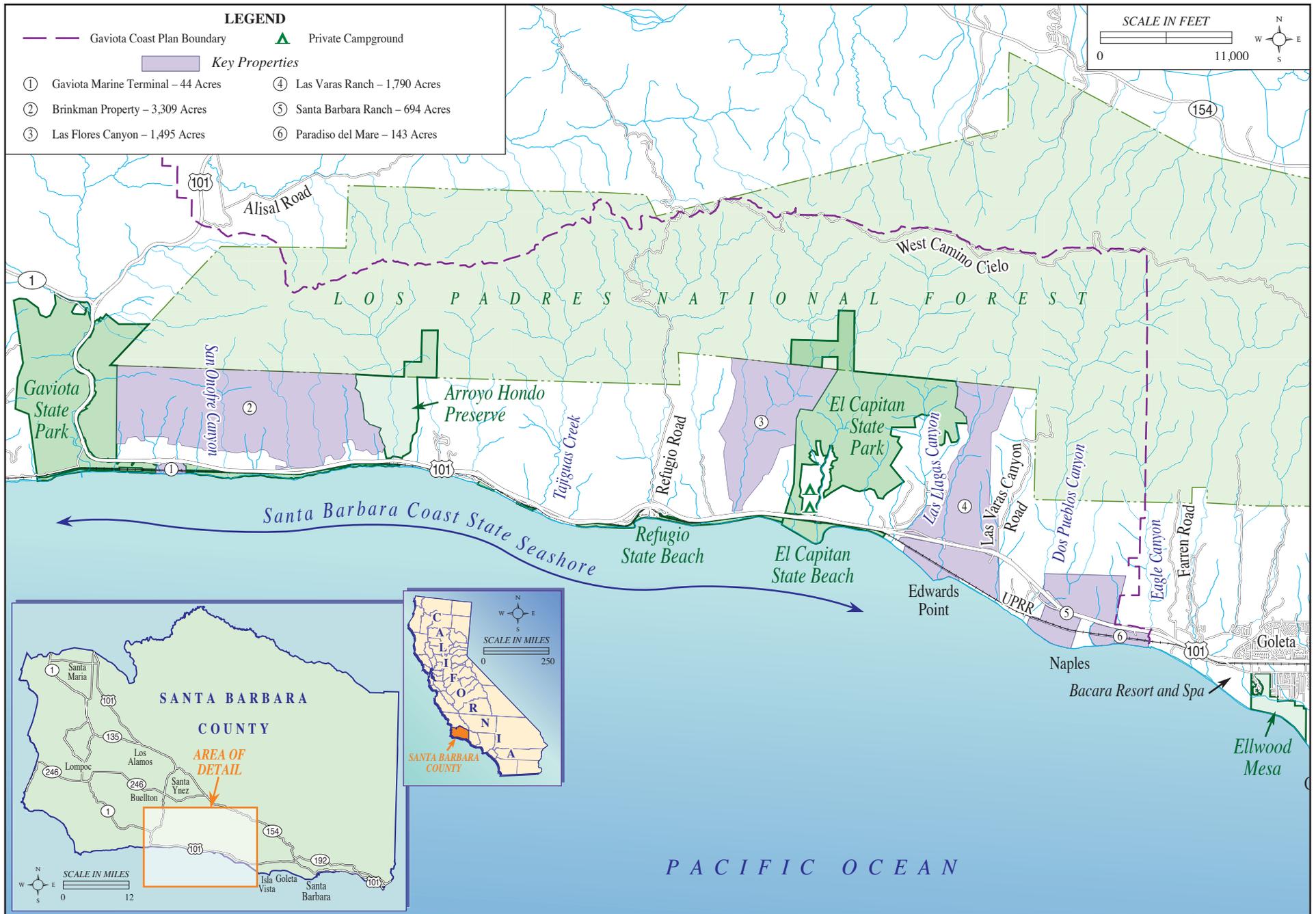


Figure 1-1. Gaviota Coast (East End)

1.1 Purpose and Intent

The purpose of the *Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study* (Trail Study) is to provide a single objective and accessible source of information about existing coastal access on the 20 miles of the Gaviota Coast between the City of Goleta and Gaviota State Park. The Trail Study also identifies opportunities and constraints for the completion of a bluff top alignment of the Gaviota Coastal Trail and associated beach access improvements. This study is intended to supplement and expand upon information provided in Santa



This study is intended to protect public access to and along the shoreline of the Gaviota Coast and provide a framework for implementation of a nearshore alignment the California Coastal Trail and supporting coastal access.

Barbara County's draft 2013 Gaviota Coast Plan. The goal of this study is to ensure that protection and expansion of coastal trails, access, parks, open space and recreation receives attention commensurate with the Gaviota Coast's statewide and national importance, and that the public interest with regard to improved coastal access and implementation of the Coastal Trail are recognized.

The Trail Framework section of this study (Section 3) addresses trail planning along the Gaviota Coast, including on the large private land holdings in the eastern portion of the study area, where a transition from traditional agricultural use is underway. Proposals have been made for the construction of large residential estates that would close existing coastal access points and locate the Coastal Trail far from the shoreline. Development of these projects without high quality trails, coastal access, and open space protection would cause substantial public concern and would conflict with State and County goals.

In preparation of this Trail Study, the Santa Barbara County Trails Council (Trails Council) performed 15 days of field surveys to map existing coastal access and to identify potential constraints in planning new access points and a shoreline Coastal Trail. The Trails Council researched constraints, surveyed recreational users, and held two workshops to gather input on access and recreational issues of public concern along the Gaviota Coast (Appendix A). The Trails Council also reviewed all previous Gaviota Coastal Trail studies, including the *Coastal Trail System – El Capitan to Devereux Dunes* (County of Santa Barbara 1981), *Gaviota Coastal Trail* (County of Santa Barbara 2004), and the *Coastal Trail – Gaviota Segment* (State Parks 2007) as well as more than 10 past and active environmental impact reports (refer to Section 1.4). This study is intended to enhance public understanding of the Gaviota Coast as a recreational resource of state and national importance.

1.2 Provision of the California Coastal Trail and Coastal Access

Public access and use of the shoreline is a right guaranteed to all citizens by the California Constitution. The California Coastal Act was enacted in 1976 by the State Legislature to provide long-term protection of California's 1,100-mile coastline for the benefit of current and future generations. Protection and enhancement of public access to the coast is a key component of the California Coastal Act and Santa Barbara County's LCP. The Coastal Act contains policies to maximize appropriate shoreline public access and recreation, including provisions for the protection and enhancement of existing access points and for the creation of the Coastal Trail. Santa Barbara County's LCP policies and recommendations expand on and implement the California Coastal Act goal of maximizing opportunities for public access and recreation. The California Coastal Commission, the State Coastal Conservancy, California Department of Parks and Recreation, local governments, and non-profit organizations all play a role in assuring this access and use. These organizations work to improve coastal access through acquisition of property for public parks and open space, through acceptance of offers to dedicate trail easements across private property, and through construction of access improvements such as parking areas, trails and stairways.

The Trail Framework Section of this Study was prepared to be consistent with the intent and policy of the Coastal Act, providing a balanced and resource-sensitive approach to coordinated planning for coastal access.

Key Policies for the Protection and Provision of Coastal Public Access

1972 Proposition 20

- Requires that "a hiking, bicycle, and equestrian trail shall be established along or near the coast" and that "ideally the trails system should be continuous and located near the shoreline."

1976 California Coastal Act (Pub. Resources Code § 30000 et seq.)

- **Section 30210** - In carrying out the requirement of Section 4 of Article X of the California Constitution, maximum access, which shall be conspicuously posted, and recreational opportunities shall be provided for all the people consistent with public safety needs and the need to protect public rights, rights of private property owners, and natural resource areas from overuse.
- **Section 30211** – Development shall not interfere with the public's right of access to the sea where acquired through use or legislative authorization [...]
- **Section 30212.4** – Wherever appropriate and feasible, public facilities, including parking areas or facilities, shall be distributed throughout an area so as to mitigate against the impacts, social and otherwise, of overcrowding or overuse by the public of any single area.
- **Section 30221** – Oceanfront land suitable for recreational use shall be protected for recreational use and development unless present and foreseeable future demand for public or commercial recreational activities that could be accommodated on the property is already adequately provided for in the area.

1982 County of Santa Barbara LCP (Updated 2009)

- **Policy 7-18** – Expanded opportunities for access and recreation shall be provided in the Gaviota Coast planning area.
- **Policy 7-25** – Easements for trails shall be required as a condition of project approval for that portion of the trail crossing the parcel upon which the project is proposed.

2002 California Recreational Trails Plan

- Describes the Coastal Trail as a hiking, biking, and equestrian trail corridor "...from Oregon to Mexico within the sights and sounds of the Pacific Ocean."

1.3 Implementation of the California Coastal Trail

Formal planning for the California Coastal Trail was initiated in the Coastal Act of 1976, which required local jurisdictions to identify an alignment for the Coastal Trail in their LCPs. Santa Barbara County's 1982 LCP incorporated the Coastal Trail into the County's Parks, Recreation, and Trails Map, which depicts the Gaviota Coastal Trail along the shoreline of the Gaviota Coast.



"The Coastal Trail will rival any long-distance trail in the world for scenic beauty, diverse landscapes and interesting locations." – California Coastal Conservancy

The State defines the Coastal Trail as: "A continuous public right-of-way along the California coastline; a trail designed to foster appreciation and stewardship of scenic and natural resources of the coast..." In 2003, at the direction of the State Legislature (SB 908), the Coastal Conservancy published *Completing the California Coastal Trail*, which provides a strategic blueprint for the alignment, design, and implementation of the Coastal Trail.

This *Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study* adheres to the direction provided by Proposition 20, State Coastal Act, 2002 State Recreational Trails Plan, Coastal Conservancy Guidelines, and the County's LCP with regard to the location of the Gaviota Coastal Trail and new coastal access points. The Trail Framework (Section 3) of this study is intended to be consistent with the guidelines and principles outlined by the Coastal Conservancy and accomplishes statewide objectives for the Coastal Trail, such as separation from motor traffic and proximity to the Pacific Ocean.

Coastal Conservancy Guidelines for Completing the California Coastal Trail

Alignment

- "Provide a continuous trail as close to the ocean as possible with connections to the shoreline at appropriate intervals and sufficient transportation access to encourage public use" (Objective 1).
- "Wherever feasible, the Coastal Trail should be within the sight, sound, or at least the scent of the sea. The traveler should have a persisting awareness of the Pacific Ocean. It is the presence of the ocean that distinguishes the seaside trail from other visitor destinations."
- "The Coastal Trail should be continuous and separated from motor traffic."

Design

- "Design the California Coastal Trail to provide a valuable experience for the user by protecting the natural environment and cultural resources while providing public access to beaches, scenic vistas, wildlife, viewing areas, recreation or interpretive facilities, and other points of interest" (Objective 5).

Implementation

- "Assure the location and design of the Coastal Trail is consistent with the policies of the California Coastal Act and local coastal programs, and is respectful of the rights of private landowners" (Objective 4).

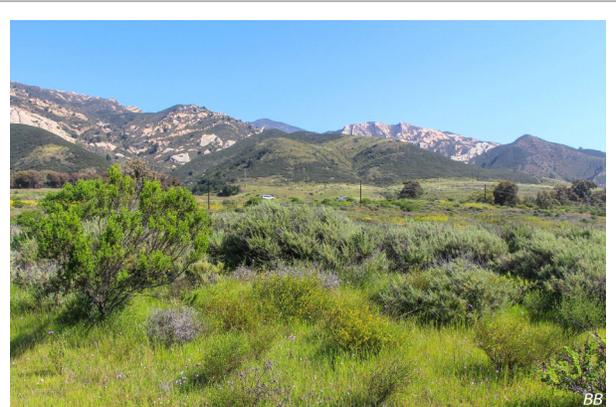
1.4 Previous Gaviota Coastal Trail Studies

The *Gaviota Coastal Trail and Access Study* utilizes and builds upon Coastal Trail planning studies and environmental review for proposed trail corridors on the Gaviota Coast:

Santa Barbara County Coastal Trail System: El Capitan – Devereux Dunes Segment Final Environmental Impact Report (June 1981). This general programmatic environmental impact report (EIR) assessed the impacts of constructing a 10- mile-long parallel bike path and dirt Coastal Trail between Isla Vista and El Capitan State Beach. The EIR assessed the impacts of as many as six trail corridors, including nearshore alignments on the east end the Gaviota Coast (e.g., Paradiso del Mare) and routes closer to and parallel of US 101 along the north and south of US 101.

Santa Barbara County: Gaviota Coastal Trail (May 2004). This unpublished study reviewed four alternatives for completion of a 14.5-mile Coastal Trail from the Bacara Resort west to Cañada San Onofre. The study reviewed corridors north and south of US 101, including alignments along frontage roads near US 101 and a nearshore alignment from Bacara Resort west to El Capitan State Beach, as well as a detailed review of a road shoulder trail from Refugio State Beach west to Cañada San Onofre. The study included a land survey of the 14.5-mile trail corridor, preliminary engineering, mapping and a general assessment of environmental constraints, and initial trail construction cost estimates (Appendix D).

State Parks: California Coastal Trail – Gaviota Segment Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (July 2007). This draft IS/MND evaluated the potential impacts of a 2.5-mile-long paved bike path and parallel dirt hiking/ equestrian Coastal Trail along the bluffs in eastern Gaviota State Park. This Gaviota Coastal Trail segment would be a scenic bluff top off-highway trail from the Gaviota State Park entrance road east through the Gaviota Marine Terminal to near Cañada San Onofre. The majority of the trail is proposed across the broad bluff



State Parks conducted engineering design and environmental review for a 2.5-mile segment of Coastal Trail on Gaviota State Parks bluff top. Final permitting and funding are still required.

top within State Park property, but includes areas within the US 101 ROW as well as 0.6 mile through the Gaviota Marine Terminal on an existing offer to dedicate. Engineering design and environmental review require approval; final project permitting and funding are still required.

Additional Key Documents: Many recent EIRs prepared by Santa Barbara County for proposed developments with Gaviota Coastal Trail segments were reviewed for this study, including those for Paradiso del Mare (2013); Arco Dos Pueblos Golf Course (1993); Santa Barbara Ranch (2008) and the Las Varas Ranch (2011). Additional key Santa Barbara County documents included the draft Gaviota Coast Plan (2013), a Perspective on Gaviota Coast Resources (2002) and the Coastal Land Use Plan (1982; republished 2009).

2.0 Existing Coastal Access and Recreation

This section documents the importance of the Gaviota Coast as a recreational resource of local, state, and nationwide importance. Coastal access locations and use information is drawn from prior studies and official State Parks data, and supplemented with Trails Council-performed recreational use surveys. Data show significant levels of use within developed State Parks as well as at 22 informal coastal access locations.



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2.0 Existing Coastal Access and Recreation

Overview: The Gaviota Coast receives well over ½ million annual recreational visitors. Tens of thousands of these visitors access the coast via 22 free roadside parking areas and associated beach access trails.

2.1 Overview of Existing Coastal Access

The Gaviota Coast is recognized as a recreational area of statewide and national importance by Santa Barbara County and the State and Federal governments (National Park Service 2004; County of Santa Barbara 1982, 2002, 2009, 2013a). The Gaviota Coast provides access to sandy beaches and a rural shoreline that supports substantial recreational use. Major uses include beach going, sunbathing, beach walking, tide-pooling, swimming, surfing, kayaking, boating, fishing, picnicking, camping, hiking, dog-walking, bicycle riding, horseback riding, bird watching, painting and photography. Recreational observations performed by Trails Council on six days from May through August of 2013 identified more than 300 cars parked at 22 informal access locations over six days, with 900 beach goers estimated on surveyed beaches. Trails Council also collected over 150 visitor recreation surveys, which found beach goers were from throughout the County - more than 25% from the North County - and many indicated multi-generational use of the area over the last 15-45 years (Appendix A).

“The Gaviota Coast is well known as a coastal recreation destination of local and statewide importance due in part to the unspoiled beauty of the Gaviota Coast and miles of relatively pristine coastline.”

-County of Santa Barbara 2013a

2.2 Existing Coastal Access and Recreational Use

The South Coast of Santa Barbara County supports a variety of coastal access facilities, which are heavily used by local residents and visitors, and are a foundation of the region’s robust tourism industry. Although comprehensive surveys do not appear available, these



Highly popular state beaches such as Gaviota State Park provide amenities including beach parking, restrooms, a pier, fishing, boat launch, and beach front picnic facilities.



Informal coastal access points such as Tajiguas Beach offer recreational opportunities including beach going, fishing, surfing and swimming, from US 101 roadside or frontage road parking areas.

beaches and shoreline experience well over 5 million recreational users annually. On the Gaviota Coast, recreational use is concentrated within the three State Parks, which receive over 560,000 annual visitors, with El Capitan State Beach receiving the highest levels of use (Table 2-1). The Gaviota Coast receives substantial recreational use from both local residents and visitors. Recreational use and coastal access occurs within developed State Parks and at 12 major and 10 minor informal coastal access points that cross state owned and private lands (Figure 2-1).



Remote beaches along the Gaviota Coast receive particularly heavy use in summer and fall, with visitors enjoying beach going, sunning, dog walking, swimming, surfing and fishing. The existing 22 informal beach access parking areas and associated coastal access trails are an important recreational resource.

Approximately 58% (11.4 miles) of the 19.7 miles of shoreline of Gaviota Coast between the Bacara Resort and Spa (Bacara Resort) and Gaviota State Park are under public ownership in the *Santa Barbara Coast State Seashore*, while 42% (8.3 miles) are privately owned (Trails Council 2013).¹ Three State Parks – El Capitan and Refugio State Beaches, Gaviota State Park and other publically owned oceanfront land – are located in the central and western portions of the Gaviota Coast. As discussed below, these three parks include public beaches and developed parking, campsites, picnic tables, lawns, and trails with day use beach access fees of \$10.

Table 2-1. State Parks Entrance Station Counts

Beach Park	Total Visitors	
	FY 2011-2012	Annual Average Since 1973
Gaviota State Park	81,854	136,647
Refugio State Beach	180,208	183,087
El Capitan State Beach	217,423	244,767
TOTAL	479,485	564,501

Notes: FY – Fiscal Year; Attendance estimates are believed to be substantially underestimated (State Parks 2012).
Source: State Parks 2012; 2013.

While visitation is concentrated at developed State Beach facilities, informal recreational use of more remote beaches also comprises a significant source of coastal recreational activity. However, quantified data on levels and types of use within these areas does not appear to have been formally compiled by local or state agencies. In order to provide initial data on recreational use of roadside parking areas and more isolated beaches, Trails

¹ The Santa Barbara Coast State Seashore extends from Gaviota State Park to Las Llagas Canyon, including Gaviota State Park, Refugio State Beach, and El Capitan State Beach (Public Resources Code 5001.6(b)(8)); 0.3 miles of shoreline consisting of 9.0 acres is also owned by State Parks near Arroyo Quemada and Tajiguas Creek; however, no formal access is provided.

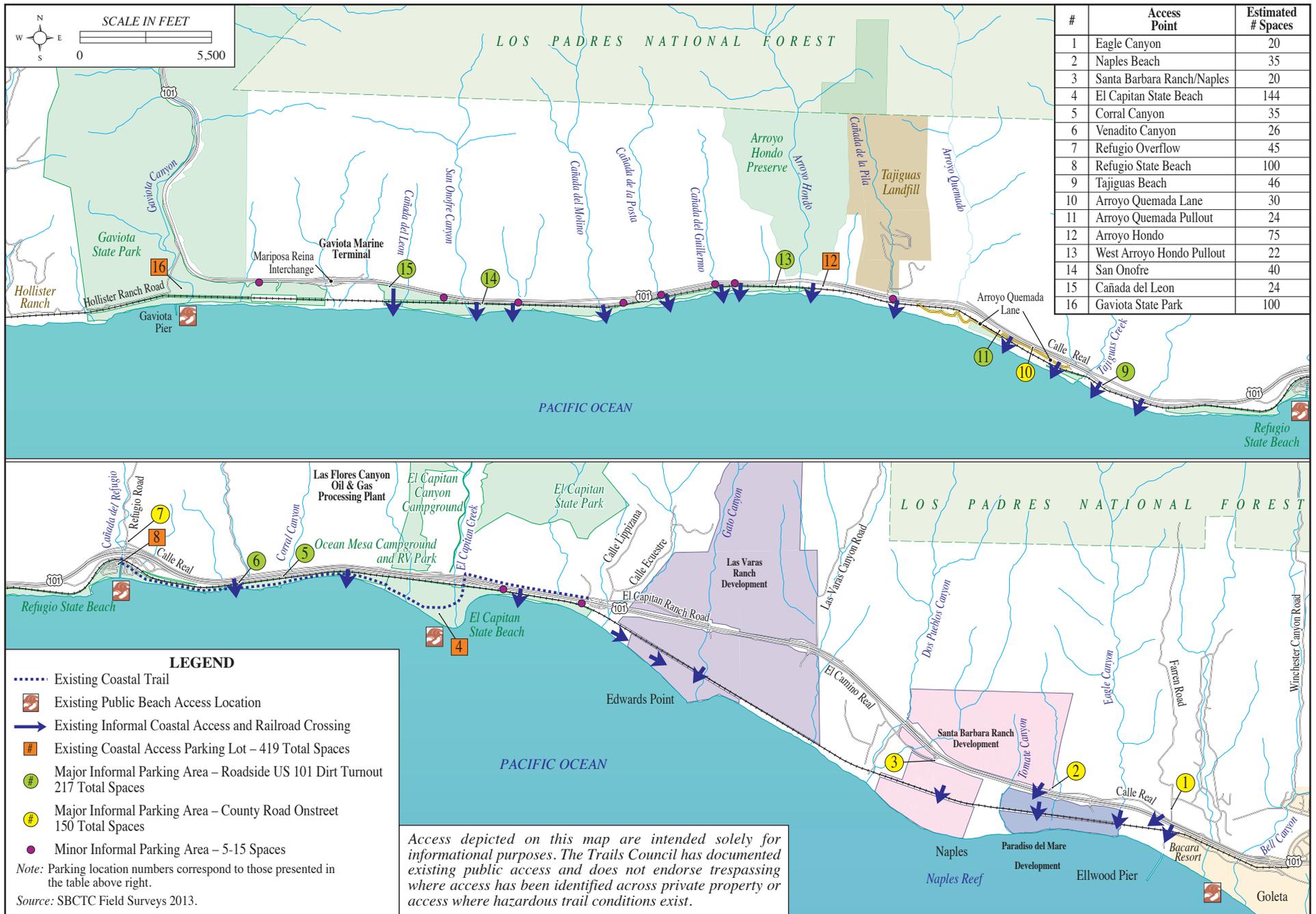
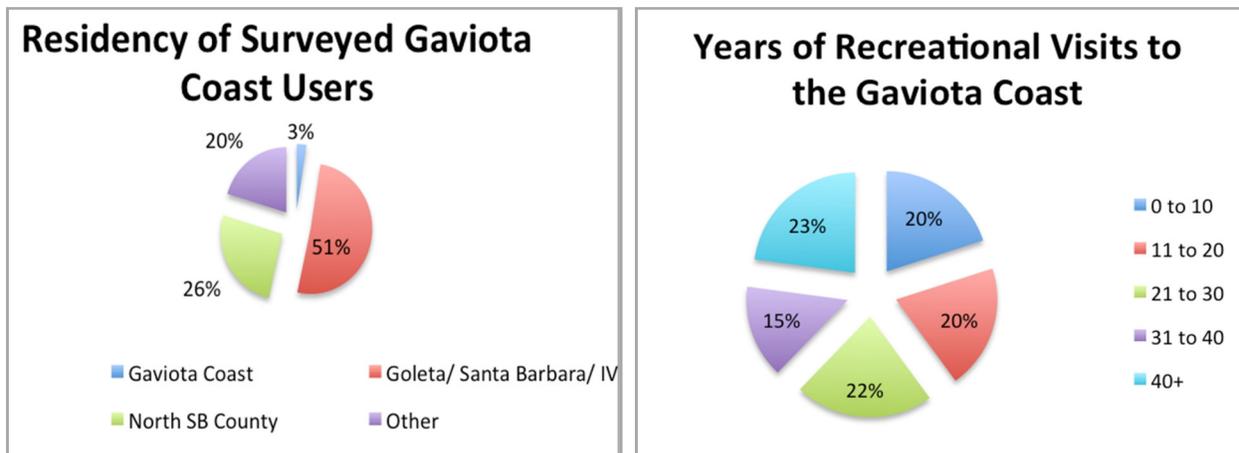


Figure 2-1. Existing Coastal Access and Parking

Council surveyors recorded recreational uses during six surveys between March and August 2013, with four surveys conducted in spring and two in summer. Over six partial days of windshield based counts, Trails Council surveyors identified over 300 vehicles parked at 22 informal locations.² During these surveys, an estimated 900 beach goers were counted engaged in sunbathing, beach walking, swimming, surfing, scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking, boating, fishing, hiking, dog-walking, biking, informal camping, and photography. Levels of use varied substantially, however, Canada San Onofre and Tajiguas access points consistently received the highest levels of use (Appendix A).

A recreational use questionnaire was also utilized to obtain information on public recreational use of the Gaviota Coast, including personal history of use and the types of recreation enjoyed. Trails Council volunteers asked the public to fill out questionnaires at Tajiguas Beach and public events (e.g., farmers markets), as well as online.³ Over 150 recreational use surveys were completed. Data show that Gaviota Coast visitors are from throughout the County, with over 50% from the South Coast, more than 25% from the North County and 20% from outside the County.⁴ Over 55% of the public surveyed indicated they had been visiting the Gaviota Coast for over 20 years, with many indicating multi-generational use (Appendix A). On average, the public members surveyed visit the Gaviota Coast over 40 times per year, with summer and fall indicated as the most popular times to visit; however, many indicated visiting throughout the year. Beach going, walking/hiking, and dog walking were the most frequent forms of recreation engaged in, however, fishing and surfing were also popular uses.



Coastal recreation and beach access are major attractions on the South Coast as are all forms of nature based outdoor marine recreation; the largest future increases in this activity are expected for beach going (California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW]

² Trails Council surveys included an average of two drive-by windshields surveys of 22 known informal parking and access points along 20 miles of coast over a five hour period on each survey day, for a total of 10 drive-by surveys. Surveys were generally conducted during peak use periods (e.g., 10 am to 2pm). As a result, surveys may overlook early morning surf and fishing/diving users or users visiting for late afternoons or sunsets. Further, the majority of surveys were conducted in spring and not peak summer-fall use periods. Trails Council staff also walked most major access points to count the types and quantity of recreational uses on four occasions.

³ These questionnaires were circulated via the internet from a link on the Trails Council website

⁴ North County residents and tourist use are likely underrepresented as 54 of 150 surveys were collected at Tajiguas Beach, while over 100 were collected at South coast events such as farmers markets or online. Insufficient staff and funding were available to further canvas North County events and surveys were not collected at the Arroyo Hondo Scenic Overlook, heavily used by passersby and tourists.

2009). As population in California steadily increases, Santa Barbara County anticipated to grow by 127% by 2040 (Santa Barbara County Association of Governments [SBCAG] 2012). The County has determined that existing coastal recreational facilities are inadequate to handle existing demand, within developed State Parks and that adequate public access is not available in the eastern Gaviota Coast (County of Santa Barbara 2009; 2013b).

Formal Access Locations

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) manages Gaviota State Park, Refugio and El Capitan State Beaches, which encompass approximately 11.4 miles of coast and approximately 5,570 acres of coastal and foothill areas (Table 2-2). These parks provide public beaches, picnic areas, and campgrounds, and receive an annual visitation of over 560,000 residents and visitors (State Parks 2013). Due to a lack of coastal access in northern Santa Barbara County, residents of Solvang, Buellton, Santa Ynez, Lompoc and Santa Maria use these beach parks and other informal access points along Gaviota for coastal access and recreation.

These State Parks are used to capacity, particularly during summer weekends. At times of peak demand, existing facilities are insufficient to accommodate recreational demand and people are often turned away. During spring, summer and fall, these campgrounds often sell out six months in advance, with many campsites reserved within hours of becoming available. Demand for coastal recreational access is expected to continue to increase due to growth in population, tourism, and the popularity of many coastal dependent or related recreational activities (County of Santa Barbara 2009).



Gaviota beach parks offer scenic recreational amenities utilized by over 560,000 people annually.



Gaviota State Park provides the only public pier for nearly 60 miles of coastline between Goleta and Pismo Beach. The pier is popular for fishing and boat launching.

Table 2-2. Formal Coastal Recreation Areas

Name	Overview						
	Acreage	Beach Frontage	Beach Parking ¹	Coastal Trail	Beach Access	ADA Access	Recreation
El Capitan State Beach	2,634 (133 in beach park)	1.9 miles	170	Paved bike path; offroad trails	4 trails/ 2 stairways, beach front parking	✓	Public beach, 142 campsites, bike path, picnicking, hiking, surfing
Refugio State Beach	155	3.5 miles	100	Paved bike path; ½ mile loop trail	Beach front parking	✓	Public beach, 71 campsites, bike path, picnicking, playground
Gaviota State Park	2,781	6.2 miles	100	Informal bluff top dirt trails	Beach front parking	✓	Public beach, 40 campsites pier, boat launch, trails, picnicking,
TOTAL	5,570	11.6 miles	370	4.5 miles	-	-	-

¹ Beach access parking may be used by campers, especially at El Capitan due to distance of some campsites from developed beach, reducing the number of day uses spaces available to general public. Day use parking fees are \$10/ day.
Source: State Parks 2012; County of Santa Barbara 2013a.

El Capitan State Beach includes a developed coastal beach park, campground and open space north of US Highway 101 (US 101). The 133-acre coastal area supports a wide sandy beach, restrooms, 12 grassy shoreline day use picnic/ BBQ sites and a store. A network of developed and informal trails extends through the park along the shoreline and in riparian woodland along El Capitan Creek. Coastal Trail users can access the Park’s trails from the mile-long developed bike path north of US 101 that enters the Park from the east. Coastal Trail users can follow this bike path, Park access roads or trails through the Park to a developed bluff top trail. The “Aniso” segment of the California Coastal Trail is a paved bike path that begins west of the Park’s group campgrounds and extends west for 2.5 miles to Refugio State Beach; 450-feet of this trail is currently formally closed due to coastal erosion approximately ¾ mile west of the El Capitan group campgrounds.

Refugio State Beach is a developed coastal beach park with campground, 20 day-use shoreline picnic areas, a store, a ½ mile long shoreline and bluff top loop trail, and an interpretative center. The ½ mile long cove at this Park is the widest, most consistently sandy beach on the Gaviota Coast. Refugio State Beach accommodates summer camp programs such as Santa Ynez Junior Life Guards and YMCA camps and is linked to El Capitan State Beach Park by a bluff top reach of the “Aniso” segment of the Coastal Trail.

Gaviota State Park provides a developed coastal beach park with 12 shoreline picnic sites, a shoreline small watercraft launch area, and the only public fishing pier and boat launch along 60 miles of shoreline between Goleta Beach and Pismo Beach to the north. This Park extends inland into the Santa Ynez Mountains and supports over 11 miles of foothill public hiking trails. This Park also extends east along the shoreline for more than 5 miles, including over 2 miles of a broad coastal terrace of between 200 to 750 feet in width south of US 101. Five major informal coastal access points and a network of bluff top trails, including Cañada de Leon and San Onofre are located in the eastern section of this park, with free informal roadside parking for approximately 110 vehicles located off of US 101.

Informal Access Locations

Informal coastal access trails are an important free recreational resource along the Gaviota Coast enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors annually. Twelve major informal coastal access parking areas and ten minor parking areas provide access to trails that cross both public and private lands outside of the developed State Parks.⁵ Parking areas at these access points can accommodate approximately 300 vehicles in roadside dirt turnouts along US 101, as well as parking for an additional 150 vehicles along County roads such as Calle Real, Arroyo Quemada Lane and El Capitan Ranch Road. Sixteen of these 22 access trails cross land that is primarily owned by the public, while six cross private property. Most have been in use for decades and provide access to beaches held in trust for the public, with access to and along the shoreline guaranteed by the California Constitution and the California Coastal Act (Coastal Act Sections 30210 – 30223).

Recent Gaviota Coast recreational use surveys found a high proportion of North County residents from cities such as Lompoc, Solvang and Buellton using informal access; many residents have been using these beaches for generations.

—Trails Council 2013

Informal Access on Public Land:

Undeveloped bluff top areas of the State Parks support 12 informal coastal access trails that receive heavy public use. Free parking along US 101 at these informal coastal access points provides space for approximately 200 vehicles. Along this public land, the UPRR is located seaward of US 101, often at the bluff edge, which requires substantial



Informal roadside parking areas along US 101 adjacent to the UPRR and the bluffs accommodate from 5 to 40 vehicles each, offering free parking and trails to approximately 8 miles of publicly owned shoreline outside of developed state beach parks.

unauthorized public use of trails crossing the UPRR to reach the shore. These trails lead across the narrow bluff top to sandy beaches such as Tajiguas Beach and to rocky pocket beaches such as Cañada del Molino.

Informal Access on Private Land: Private land holdings along the shoreline of the Gaviota Coast are concentrated in two locations: the eastern Gaviota Coast and areas between Refugio State Beach and Arroyo Hondo. The largest area of private land is located on the broad coastal terrace that extends for 5.2 miles along the shoreline between the Bacara Resort and El Capitan State Beach, which is under the ownership of seven different owners. This broad terrace ranges from 900 to over 3,000 feet in width between US 101 and the shoreline. Additional bluff top/ shoreline private land, held under 11 different owners, extends for 3.3 miles west from Refugio State Beach to Arroyo Hondo Preserve, with

⁵ Major informal parking areas are defined as those capable of providing parking for 15+ vehicles.

0.7 miles located on the Gaviota Marine Terminal site near the west end of the study area. Six major access routes cross private lands within these areas, with the UPRR serving in some cases as a lateral access corridor.

Parking for these informal trails that cross private land includes six corresponding locations, with room for approximately 150 vehicles along Calle Real, El Capitan Ranch Road and Arroyo Quemada Lane as well as US 101 turnouts. The trails access the coast at Burmah or Seals Beach, Naples, Edwards Point, Tajiguas Beach and other locations. Many of these trails require longer hikes to the beach of ¼- to 1-mile due to the width of the coastal bluffs along the eastern end of the Coast. These trails include eight major crossing points of the UPRR and also use the UPRR corridor for lateral access along the coast at locations such as 8501 Hollister, Paradiso del Mare and the Las Varas Ranch.⁶

2.3 Existing Informal Access Point Overviews

The Gaviota Coast's 22 existing informal access points offer users a wide range of experiences, from heavily used sandy pocket beaches to remote surf spots and wild land beaches well removed from regular public access. Eight of the more heavily used informal access points are described below to provide an overview of the typical beaches and access routes encountered at these locations. The potential challenges and opportunities to improving formal coastal access at these locations are also discussed.



Privately owned sections of the coast, such as the Las Varas Ranch (foreground) and the Santa Barbara Ranch or Naples property (background), support substantial informal public coastal access. Access trails cross the broad coastal terrace from parking on County roads and US 101 to popular beaches and surf breaks such as Naples Reef, Deadman's and Seals. Photo Credit: John Wiley

⁶ This study documents existing public access on the Gaviota Coast. Trails Council does not endorse trespassing where existing public access has been identified across private property.

Paradiso del Maré

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: Makar Properties

Parking: Roadside along Calle Real north of US 101; 30-35 parking spaces located 0.25 miles west of intersection with US 101.

US 101 Access: Access to parking from US 101 is available via turn lanes and an existing median opening.

Coastal Access Trail: Trail users dash across US 101 to existing 2-footwide dirt trail which travels 900 feet across the bluff to the UPRR, then 2,400 feet west to Tomate Canyon access trail.

Beach Access: Dirt trail descends 50 feet high bluff-face down to beach.

Railroad Crossings: One informal at-grade railroad crossing; existing wooden bridge to east also in use; UPRR is also used for lateral access.

Beach Conditions: Intertidal sandy beach rock outcroppings and reefs.

Existing Uses: Surfing, beach and dog walking, fishing, wildlife viewing, tide-pooling.

Level of Use: Moderate; high during major swells.

Existing Conditions: This informal coastal access has a long history of public recreational use. Many groups routinely cross this stretch of private land, with as many as 200 surfers using this trail in one day during a major swell (Santa Barbara County 2013b). This trail joins with a partially paved road south of the UPRR that leads to the bluff face access trail. Parking access is via a developed at-grade intersection with over 1,900 feet of line of sight on US 101 (Santa Barbara County 2013b). However, the existing informal trail crossing of US 101 is potentially dangerous, with user running across four lanes of high-speed traffic.

Access Improvement Opportunity: Access improvements at this site should include a parking lot for up to 30 cars, a 480 foot-long coastal access trail leading to the bluffs to connect with a planned one mile long bluff top segment of the Coastal Trail; these improvements would be consistent with current offers to dedicate easements as part of the Paradiso del Mare development. Access across the UPRR would require a bridge. The existing beach access trail should be replaced with a new Tomate Canyon West beach access trail located 1,500 feet west on Makar-owned Naples lots (see Figure 3-1). A 10-15 high stairway should be constructed at the end of this canyon to connect to this relatively sheltered beach.



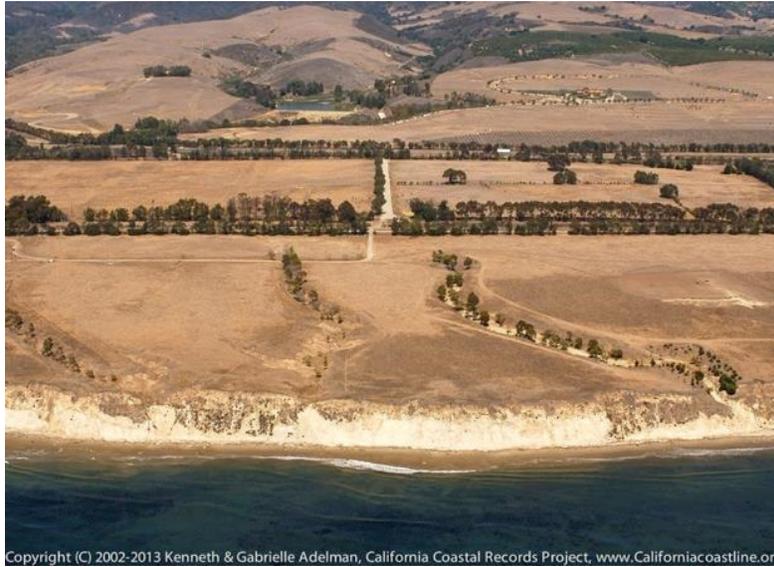
The existing coastal access trail descends the 50-foot high bluff with users emerging in close proximity to an existing seal haul out. Although the seals appear acclimated to existing use levels, development of formal access or increased use of this trail would conflict with wildlife protection standards.



Long term replacement coastal access should be provided in a shallow canyon located 1,500 feet west of Tomate Canyon and the seal haul out; a short stairway should be constructed on pilings to connect this trail down the 10-15 foot high drop off to beach.

Santa Barbara Ranch

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: Missouri's First Bank.

Parking: 20 roadside spaces on the aptly named Naples Access Road.

US 101 Access: On- and off-ramps at Dos Pueblos Canyon exit.

Coastal Access Trail: Gravel and dirt road traverses coastal terrace across UPRR to gap in bluff; additional trail access from Paradiso site to east.

Beach Access: Dirt trail descends steeply through a small canyon. Also linked to access trails across Paradiso site to the east.

Railroad Crossings: Developed signed private at-grade railroad crossing, which was recently improved.

Beach Conditions: Wide sandy intertidal beach with scattered rock outcroppings. Dry sandy beach berm develops in summer.

Existing Uses: Beach going, tide pooling, swimming, surfing, kayaking.

Level of Use: Moderate; high during major swells.

Existing Conditions: This informal coastal access has a long history of public recreational use. Several coastal access trails cross the site, with the main trail following a eucalyptus-lined roadway to an at-grade railroad crossing with improved paved surface, but no safety controls. The trail crosses pasture grazed by about 40 head of cattle in 2013. Access also occurs along the bluff top from the Paradiso del Mare site to the east. Existing beach access descends a steep shale trail in a shallow gully (photo below, left) cut in near vertical bluff face.

Access Improvement Opportunity: Access improvements at this site could include a parking lot for up to 30 cars off of the frontage road, a ½ mile long coastal access trail, following existing roads described above, leading to the bluffs to connect with a planned 1.5-mile long bluff top segment of the Coastal Trail. The existing canyon beach access trail will require improvement such as railroad ties or wooden steps in the shallow canyon, with a short 10-15-foot high stairway down the lower bluff to the beach. Public acquisition of all or most of the bluff top open space located seaward of the UPRR should also be a high priority for this location.



The existing beach access trail descends a small draw or canyon with the last 6-7 feet a relatively steep descent. Improvements to this access trail could include use of railroad ties or wooden stairs, with the lower 10-15 feet constructed on wooden pilings.



The beach that lies just below Santa Barbara Ranch offers an array of recreational activities and is a noted surf break. Uncrowded surf conditions along the Gaviota Coast are valued by the surfing community. Naples Reef, a State Marine Conservation Area, also offers excellent snorkeling and scuba diving.

Las Varas Ranch

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: Doheny Family.
Parking: 14 roadside spaces near El Capitan Ranch Road onramp.
US 101 Access: On- and off-ramps at El Capitan Ranch Road exit.
Coastal Access Trail: Trail follows UPRR corridor to ranch roads across the broad bluff top.
Beach Access: Three existing beach access points; level area near Gato Creek; Las Varas Creek tunnel; bluff face trail.
Railroad Crossings: Two developed signed private at-grade railroad crossing. Two tunnels.
Beach Conditions: Wide sandy intertidal beach with scattered rock outcroppings. Dry sandy beach berm develops in summer.
Existing Uses: Beach going, hiking, fishing, tide pooling, swimming, surfing.
Level of Use: Low – moderate.

Existing Conditions: This informal coastal access has long received low - moderate levels of informal public recreational use across this private property; the ranch is fenced, including barbed wire along the UPRR. Existing access follows the UPRR from roadside parking on El Capitan Ranch east to an at-grade railroad crossing or the Gato Creek tunnel; beach access follows ranch roads across the bluff top to the beach near Gato Creek. Additional informal beach access is via trails on the east end of the ranch through the Las Varas Creek Tunnel or a trail down the bluff.

Access Improvement Opportunity: Access improvements on Las Varas Ranch should be designed to protect the areas rural character. A parking lot for up to 30 cars could be developed at the main ranch entrance road west of Las Varas Creek and a one mile long access trail developed to connect to a planned 1.3-mile long bluff top segment of the Coastal Trail. Low-level onstreet parking on El Capitan Ranch road should be maintained. Consistent with the County’s 1982 LCP, the 108 acres of bluff top open space seaward of the UPRR should be acquired for public open space or low level camping.



This existing informal beach access trail located just east of Las Varas Ranch leads down the bluff face to a broad sandy beach and well used beach shack. The trail is used by local residents and visitors to access the broad sandy beaches fronting the east end of Las Varas Ranch.



The wide scenic bluff top at Las Varas Ranch receives low-moderate levels of public use via the UPRR corridor and existing ranch roads. The draft Gaviota Coast Plan identifies a 108-acre recreation overlay for Las Varas bluff top areas – acquisition of bluff tops for open space and recreation should be a high priority.

Tajiguas Beach

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: Maz Properties, Staben, (private) and State Parks.

Parking: Roadside gravel pullout off of US 101, 580 feet long with parking for up to 46 vehicles; additional parking on Arroyo Quemada Lane.

US 101 Access: Roadside pullout off of southbound travel lane; line-of-sight approximately 800 feet to the west.

Coastal Access Trail: Numerous minor trails lead from parking area, across UPRR, and converge at a main 4-foot wide dirt trail.

Beach Access: A 4-foot wide dirt and rock trail descends gently down the 30-foot high bluff to the beach.

Railroad Crossings: One major and two smaller informal at-grade crossings.

Beach Conditions: Wide sandy 800 foot long pocket beach with wide summer berm.

Existing Uses: Sun bathing, fishing, swimming, kayaking, diving/snorkeling, beach/dog walking, rock fire pits.

Level of Use: High.

Existing Conditions: Tajiguas Beach is protected by a small point to the west and is one of the Gaviota Coast's widest sandy beaches. The beach receives high levels of public access and is popular for beach going, fishing, kayaking, scuba diving, and surfing. This area includes substantial informal parking for peak summer use, with access available off of US 101 and from Arroyo Quemada Lane 1,100 feet to the west. Access requires substantial unauthorized crossing of the UPRR.

Access Improvement Opportunity: The large US 101 roadside parking area, gently sloping coastal access trail, and high quality wide sandy beach make this site a key location for continued informal public coastal access. Development of a formal access point at this location would require installation of a developed at-grade crossing at the UPRR and may raise traffic safety concerns with Caltrans— expensive and time-consuming issues; however, channelized informal access across the railroad, such as was implemented at Santa Claus Lane by UPRR, could enhance public safety without the cost and time associated with formal permitting. Existing access trails would require only limited improvements (e.g., railroad ties; short stairway to beach). Historic public roadside parking on US 101 and Arroyo Quemada Lane roadside should be protected.



The 580 foot-long roadside pullout at Tajiguas Beach accommodates approximately 46 vehicles. Several informal trails from the parking area cross the railroad then consolidate into a wide path that leads to the beach.



Tajiguas Beach is one of the widest on the Gaviota Coast with easy access. Existing activities include dog walking, kayaking, swimming, kite-surfing, sun bathing, Frisbee, scuba diving, informal camping and beach fires. Recent surveys found that 52 percent of 59 visitors were from North County.

Arroyo Quemada Lane

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: Santa Barbara County; UPRR.

Parking: Six turnouts on Arroyo Quemada Lane currently accommodate up to 30 cars.

US 101 Access: Existing at-grade intersection with US 101 with both northbound and southbound access.

Coastal Access Trail: Six informal trails along the 3,000 feet of public road lead to Arroyo Quemada Beach; additional 1,200-foot access trail runs east across narrow bluff to Tajiguas Beach.

Beach Access: Trails descends 30 feet down steep bluff face to UPRR seawall to reach the beach.

Railroad Crossings: Six informal at-grade crossings lead from the parking areas.

Beach Conditions: Sandy intertidal beach with degraded seawall.

Existing Uses: Beach-going, dog walking, fishing.

Level of Use: Low-Moderate.

Existing Conditions: Arroyo Quemada Lane is a two lane County road with a fully developed at grade intersection with US 101 with left turn channelization. This road is public for over 3,000 feet west to an existing formal at-grade crossing of the UPRR where it appears to become a private road. Six informal trails lead from shaded roadside parking south across the UPRR and down steep 20-30-foot bluffs to the intertidal beach, or east to approximately 1,200 feet to Tajiguas Beach. The beach at Arroyo Quemada is sandy intertidal and backed by a degraded seawall for approximately ½ mile.

Access Improvement Opportunity: This location has fully developed access to US 101, a major advantage. However, lack of existing railroad bridges or tunnels would require use of the existing at-grade private crossing, development of a new at-grade crossing or a bridge for access across the UPRR. Improved coastal access would also require construction of a more formal trail down the bluff face. Arroyo Quemada Lane provides an important presently developed route for the Coastal Trail and should be retained by the County. The County could also explore acquisition and development of the existing eastern private at-grade crossing of the UPRR for potential use as a coastal access trail.



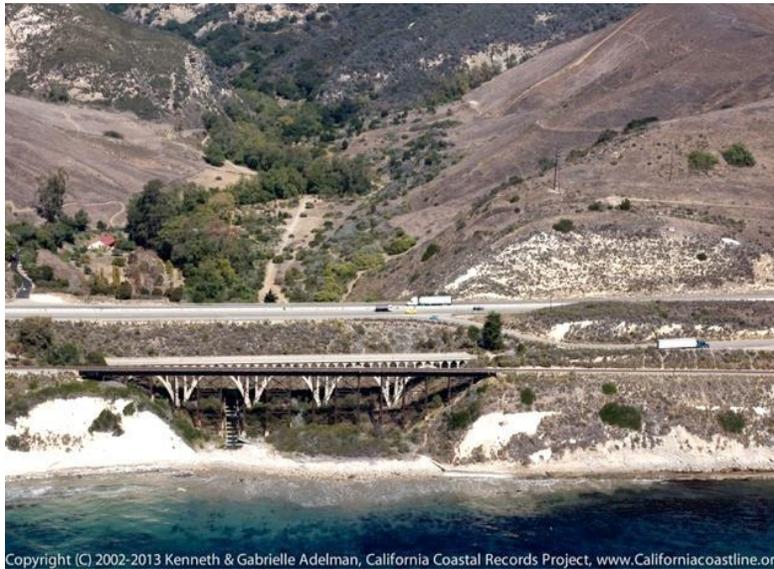
The six existing beach access trails at Arroyo Quemada are relatively steep in places. Improvements could include use of railroad ties or other rustic improvements to ease access at a single selected access location.



Arroyo Quemada Lane provides parking for approximately 30 vehicles along the County owned road. Currently most of the parking is found on the south side of the road, though there is room to create additional pullouts on the north side.

Arroyo Hondo Scenic Vista

Existing Formal Scenic Vista



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Ownership: Caltrans, UPRR, Land Trust for Santa Barbara County.

Parking: Paved parking for up to 75 cars.

US 101 Access: Off-and on-ramps from southbound US 101.

Coastal Access Trail: Informal at-grade UPRR crossing and trail to steep cement stairway under UPRR trestle bridge to canyon bottom.

Beach Access: A 2-foot wide dirt trail slopes down gently 700 feet to the beach through coastal sage habitat.

Railroad Crossings: Multiple informal at-grade crossings; shoreline access available under existing trestle bridge.

Beach Conditions: Sandy intertidal beach with rocky areas; degraded UPRR concrete seawall; steelhead trout ladder in creek.

Existing Uses: Hiking, fishing, beach going, photography.

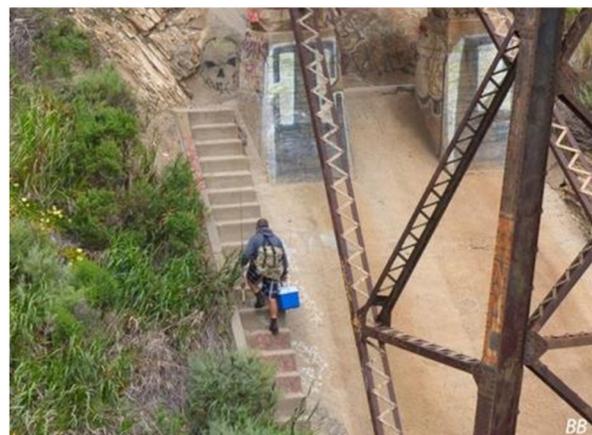
Level of Use: High (Scenic Vista); Low-moderate (Coastal Access).

Existing Conditions: The existing scenic vista point provides panoramic views of the coast and receives heavy visitation by travelers. An existing coastal access trail descends underneath the railroad trestle bridge to the intertidal beach at the mouth of Arroyo Hondo Creek. Additionally, an interpretive display describes the ecology of Arroyo Hondo at the entrance to the historic US 101 bridge, which crosses Arroyo Hondo.

Access Improvement Opportunity: Arroyo Hondo is one of the few coastal access points designated in the 1982 LCP that has US 101 access via on- and off-ramps as well a UPRR trestle bridge to provide access under the UPRR. A formal coastal access trail should be developed from near the eastern bridge abutment to avoid UPRR at-grade crossings. Use of these existing trails would require an easement from UPRR and improvements including handrails for public safety. Alternatively, a trail could be constructed cross slope on the US 101 embankment and cross under both bridges to the shoreline. This site should include a Gaviota Coast information kiosk with maps and interpretive signage (e.g., access points, sensitive species). Such improvements would provide Gaviota Coast visitors with information on the Gaviota Coast and a safe way to the beach.



The Scenic Vista off-ramp receives heavy visitation from travelers on US 101; parking exists for up to 75 vehicles. This site is an ideal location to inform travelers and visitors of the Gaviota Coast's recreational opportunities and resources.



The existing informal trail crosses the railroad then winds underneath the trestle to concrete stairs that descend to a dirt path to the beach. The existing trestle bridge allows for construction of relatively inexpensive access under the UPRR.

Cañada San Onofre

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: California State Parks.

Parking: Roadside gravel pullout off of US 101, 400 feet long with parking for up to 40 vehicles.

US 101 Access: Roadside pullout off of southbound travel lane; line-of-sight approximately 1,500 feet.

Coastal Access: Five informal bluff top trails lead from parking to beach, with the largest being 4 feet wide.

Beach Access: Dirt trails gradually descend from bluff top to the beach.

Railroad Crossings: At least five informal at-grade railroad crossings over 400 feet.

Beach Conditions: Rocky where trail meets beach, sandy pocket beaches lie east and west of beach access.

Existing Uses: Hiking, fishing, beach going, vista point.

Level of Use: High.

Existing Conditions: Public parking is available in an approximately 400 foot-long, 40-foot wide dirt pullout between US 101 and the railroad. Informal at-grade UPRR crossings occur along the entire 400-foot frontage of the parking area and the railroad. The primary 4-foot wide access trail descends gradually down the arroyo through sage scrub habitat for 700 feet to the beach.

Access Improvement Opportunity: The history of heavy public use, the large US 101 roadside parking area, a gently sloping coastal access trail, scenic overlooks, State Parks ownership, and the approach to numerous sandy pocket beaches make this site a key location for continued public coastal access. However, development of a formal access point at this location would require installation of a developed at-grade crossing of the UPRR (an expensive and time-consuming endeavor). Existing access trails would require only limited improvements as they are gently sloping. Roadside parking at this location should be maintained and protected.



Public parking for approximately 40 vehicles is provided in a wide roadside area accessible from southbound US 101. This beach access is heavily used - the parking area can become full on sunny summer days. The lack of developed crossings necessitates high levels of trespass across the railroad to reach the beach.



Multiple trails provide access to fishing, swimming, hiking, and beach going to rocky and sandy pocket beaches. The public can access the beach from a wide, gradually descending dirt trail or from a narrower bluff top trail that descends more steeply to the beach.

Cañada del Leon – Gaviota Marine Terminal

Existing Informal Access Point



Ownership: California State Parks; Gaviota Terminal Company.

Parking: Dirt parking area up to 24 cars; with access off of southbound US 101.

US 101 Access: Access is available from southbound lane via dirt driveway off of highway shoulder.

Coastal Access Trail: Existing 3-foot wide braided dirt trail leads 720 feet across UPRR to bluff, then west 500 feet to Cañada del Leon.

Beach Access: Dirt trail descends down the 40-foot high bluff-face along west edge of UPRR seawall.

Railroad Crossings: Three informal at-grade crossing points; no existing developed at-grade crossings.

Beach Conditions: Sandy low-tide beach; rock outcroppings and reefs.

Existing Uses: Beach going, fishing, tide pooling, swimming.

Level of Use: Moderate.

Existing Conditions: The Cañada del Leon-Gaviota Marine Terminal existing informal parking, access and trails are located on land owned by the Gaviota Terminal Company (Shell Oil); however, access down to the beach is located 500 feet east of the main access trail on land owned by California State Parks. A braided trail network leads approximately 1,200 feet from an informal parking area off of US 101 along the bluff top, across the UPRR, and down a small drainage to the beach. The beach is primarily an intertidal beach, with access to wider sandy pocket beaches.

Access Improvement Opportunity: Closure of the Gaviota Marine Terminal provides an ideal opportunity for improved formal access at this location. Access should be provided via the Mariposa Reina - US 101 interchange with parking for at least 30 cars. Access could include construction of a new coastal access trail on the road that leads under the UPRR railroad trestle down Cañadas del Cemeterio and Alcatraz to the beach. This parking and access trail could also link with the planned section of the Coastal Trail that crosses this property. Additional improvements could include relocation of the Gaviota Rest Area to this site and installation of a Gaviota interpretive center with interpretive signs, maps and information regarding the area's coastal resources and public access.



The existing access trail traverses coastal sage scrub habitat on the bluff top west of the Marine Terminal and links to an existing bluff top trail system. These trails provide scenic views of the Channel Islands, Gaviota Pier and the coast to the east.



The beach at Cañada del Leon is used for fishing, sunning, and beach walking. Although rocky, swimming is also available. Gaviota State Park access lies 1.8 miles to the west; Cañada San Onofre informal access trail is 3,000 feet to the east.