



For Immediate Release

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Dana Point City Council Challenges the Coastal Commission on Restrictions to Public Access to the Dana Point Headlands

Dana Point, CA (March 17, 2026) – At their regular meeting on March 12, 2026, the California Coastal Commission (CCC) entered a consent order, which is an agreement with the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) limiting public access hours on the Dana Point Headlands Bluff Top Trail from seven-day a week access to four-day access.

At their regular meeting on March 17, 2026, the Dana Point City Council voted unanimously to authorize the City Attorney to file a writ of mandate challenging the CCC action, on the basis it did not have the jurisdiction to usurp the City's authority on enforcement action against CNLM. The City is already involved in an enforcement action against CNLM, set for trial on April 27th, asserting its restriction of access to the Trail was a violation of the Coastal Act and the public's easement rights. The City contends that the CCC decision to agree to allow CNLM to restrict public access by closing the trail three days a week circumvents the judicial process, negates the Coastal Development Permit process, and deprives the public, environmental agencies, and concerned parties the opportunity to study the issue thoroughly as part of a public, transparent process.

The Dana Point Headlands is a unique coastal resource that provides extraordinary public access to California's coastline while also serving as critical habitat for sensitive species, including the federally endangered Pacific Pocket Mouse. With the trail encompassing just 1% of the preserve area, the balance between these two important coastal priorities—public access and habitat protection—is one that is carefully considered through the current statutory process.

The trail system at the Headlands originates from the 2004 Headlands Development and Conservation Plan (HDCP), which was adopted to implement California Coastal Act policies in the area. Since the opening of the Bluff top Trail nearly 20 years ago, operational hours have generally been 7:00 a.m. to sunset, seven days a week, consistent with daylight use which takes into account the fact the Pacific Pocket Mouse is a nocturnal creature.

The City's position is that CNLM has taken an unnecessarily restrictive approach to public access, claiming this is necessary for the protection of the Pacific Pocket Mouse. Yet, the Pocket Mouse has gone from being believed to be extinct to thriving at the Headlands; and, there is no documented causal link between controlled public access hours on the designated Trail and impacts to the species' population.

Additionally, City leadership has concerns regarding CNLM's stewardship of the preserve, particularly with respect to vegetation management practices that may limit the availability of suitable food resources for the species. CNLM has also been resistant to implementing genetic rescue efforts, specifically the introduction of captive-bred, genetically diverse mice, a strategy broadly supported within the scientific community given the species' limited genetic diversity and long-term viability challenges.

For these reasons and more, the City has been and continues to fight to retain public access and implores CNLM to be good stewards of the preserve through best practices in habitat management ensuring that the Pacific Pocket Mouse thrives.

For more information on the Headlands Conservation Park trail hours and management, please visit: bit.ly/HeadlandsAlert

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