

Subject: Environmentally Destructive Policy on Del Mar Beaches – August 2, 2015

Dear Mayor Al Corti, Del Mar City Council Members and City Manager Scott Huth,

I am a lifelong Del Mar resident and an avid beach-goer. This Friday, after a morning surf, I was deeply dismayed to see that Del Mar has begun an extremely destructive beach grooming/kelp removal program on our beaches.

As you know, Del Mar has used a beach-cleaning machine for decades. This machine skimmed the top layer of sand to remove trash and debris. The machine was not capable of processing large amounts of kelp so the operators typically maneuvered around it. Because of this, its negative environmental impact was far less than what is now in place.

On Friday, a new machine was introduced that is specifically designed to remove kelp, also known as “wrack,” from our beaches. It rakes and grooms the sand, digging 6-8 inches deep leaving a groomed, lifeless trail in its path.

At first glance, it may seem that the removal of kelp is a positive thing.

What is not immediately clear is the environmental impact that kelp removal has on a beach. Several studies have shown that beach wrack is a vital part of a beach’s ecosystem.

According to the California Coastal Commission [Document Th20a, Dated 10/14/13]:

"A study comparing ungroomed and groomed beaches in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, showed the abundance and species diversity of coastal strand plants to be approximately 15 times higher at ungroomed beaches.

Regularly groomed beaches also exhibit reduced richness and biomass, of many species of invertebrates, including crustaceans and insects. This reduction of invertebrates, in turn, impacts shorebirds, including sandpipers, plover, and sanderlings that feed on crustaceans and insects in the sand."

The San Dieguito River that flows out to our beaches is in the final stages of an extensive restoration program. More than forty million dollars was spent to restore the habitat of the birds, fish and invertebrates that enjoy our shores. It is preposterous to me that we would knowingly and willingly destroy that habitat as it extends westward to our beaches.

The San Dieguito Wetlands Project Final Restoration Plan [CDP 6-81-330-A3] specifically calls out the restoration of habitat for the Western Snowy Plover – a federally threatened species [58 Federal Register 12874]. Now, in Del Mar, we have implemented a beach grooming program that directly threatens the habitat of that same species.

If you'd like to dig deeper into the science, please reference a paper entitled "Loss of Coastal Strand Habitat in Southern California: The Role of Beach Grooming" by Jennifer E. Dugan of University of California, Santa Barbara. In this paper, she specifically references the extensive beach grooming that was implemented in Coronado, California and the negative repercussions it has had on the coastal ecosystem. If I'm not mistaken, our current City Manager's previous post was in Coronado. Perhaps he can speak directly to the decline of wildlife on those beaches.

I do not doubt for a moment that Del Mar's beach grooming program was implemented with the best of intentions. We all share a common desire to make our city and its beaches the best they can be. I am proud of Del Mar's long history of environmental stewardship and open space preservation. I am, however, deeply saddened that we collectively dropped the ball on this one.

I assume that the environmental impact of the beach grooming program was simply not considered before it was implemented. It is my hope that the information I've provided here will start a discussion so that we can consider other, less destructive options. The current program is expensive and destructive. Del Mar can do better.

Mayor Corti, City Council Members and City Manager Huth, please keep in mind that Coastal Commission Coastal Act: Section 30230 states:

Marine resources shall be maintained, enhanced, and where feasible, restored. Special protection shall be given to areas and species of special biological or economic significance. Uses of the marine environment shall be carried out in a manner that will sustain the biological productivity of coastal waters and that will maintain healthy populations of all species of marine organisms adequate for long-term commercial, recreational, scientific, and educational purposes.

If the current beach grooming program is not a direct violation of the letter of the law, it is certainly a violation of the spirit of the law.

Thank you for your time. I eagerly await your reply and look forward to working with you to find a better solution.

Sincerely,

Steve Denyes, 19th Street

P.S. In the interest of transparency and vigorous debate, I have copied representatives of the San Diego Union Tribune, the Del Mar Times, The Sandpiper, Surfrider Foundation, Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley and the San Dieguito River Park on this email.