UNIT 564

HUNTINGTON STATE BEACH

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

January 1976
Resource Management Plan and General Development Plan for
HUNTINGTON STATE BEACH

H. LEE WARREN
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Resource Management Plan and General Development Plan for HUNTINGTON STATE BEACH

April 1976

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State of California — The Resources Agency  
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Resolution 2-76

Resolution adopted by the
CALIFORNIA STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
at its regular meeting in Los Angeles, California
January 9, 1976

WHEREAS the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation has presented to this Commission for approval the proposed resource management plan and general development plan for Huntington State Beach; and

WHEREAS this reflects the long-range development plan so as to provide for the optimum use and enjoyment of the unit as well as the protection of its quality;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the State Park and Recreation Commission approves the Department of Parks and Recreation’s “Resource Management Plan and General Development Plan for Huntington State Beach, Revised Preliminary” dated December 1975, subject to such environmental changes as the Director of Parks and Recreation shall determine advisable and necessary after consultation with the City of Huntington Beach officials to implement carrying out the provisions and objectives of said plan.
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FOREWORD

The purposes of the Huntington State Beach Resource Management and General Development Plans are to provide policies for the preservation of the natural resource values within the unit and guidelines for the development of facilities.

This plan is a general plan in that it is both comprehensive and flexible. It is comprehensive in that it is based on a thorough knowledge and analysis of all the known natural and recreation resource values. It is flexible in that, as new information becomes available or as the demands being made on the beach resources change, the plan can be modified to reflect these current conditions.

The planning for Huntington State Beach is based on the following assumption: that the primary importance of this area is the beach resource and its capability to satisfy a large recreation demand.
Chapter I
SUMMARY

Huntington State Beach is located in Orange County between Beach Boulevard and the outlet of the Santa Ana River. It is bounded on the inland side by the Pacific Coast Highway.

The site consists of 78 acres of flat sandy beach with 10,900 feet of ocean frontage. The average width of the beach is 400 feet. There is no surface soil or significant vegetation at the site.

Existing facilities on the beach include 12 parking lots with an overall capacity of 1,200 cars, 550 fire rings, 10 comfort stations, 15 lifeguard stands, 1 lifeguard control tower, park office, residence, maintenance yard, and 6 concession stands. Most of these facilities were constructed in 1950 and are now in substandard condition.

Huntington State Beach is the most popular state beach in southern California. It offers opportunities for a wide range of shoreline recreation activities. Each year more than 1.5 million people come here to swim, surf, fish, clam, sunbathe, play on the beach, and study shore birds and marine life habitats.

This redevelopment program, aimed at enhancing the visitors' recreation experience calls for expanding parking capacity, upgrading existing facilities and introducing landscape features.

The proposed development includes:

1. Replacement of existing comfort stations, lifeguard control tower, and concession stands
2. Improvement of traffic circulation through modification of existing roads and addition of three entrances.
3. Improvement of utilities
4. Landscaping
5. Expansion of tern sanctuary
6. Expansion of parking capacity
7. Miscellaneous items, such as bike trail and pedestrian promenade, trailer sanitation station, interpretive facilities, and lighting.
Chapter II
RESOURCES ANALYSIS

The natural resources within 'Huntington' State Beach will be analyzed and interrelated in this section, and the question of what there is to work with will be explored. The analysis will provide the basic rationale for the allowable use intensity plan and the general development plan.

Geological Resource

The primary geological resource is the beach. It provides valuable outdoor recreation opportunities, scenic vistas, and habitat for a variety of wildlife, including an endangered species.

The beach is made up of fine to coarse-grained sand to a depth of 30 feet. Although subject to constant erosions and sedimentations by natural forces, the beach appears to be stable.

Generally, the beach is suitable for high-density recreation activities; however, it might pose severe restrictions on construction of supporting facilities and plantings because of the loose and unconsolidated character of the sand and the shallow-depth saline groundwater condition existing on the beach. These problems must be taken into consideration in design and development of the beach.

Wildlife Habitat

The major habitat resources in this unit are the shoreline and the least tern sanctuary.

The sandy shoreline supports abundant marine wildlife, including sand crab, Pismo clam, and the bean clam. It also supports grunion runs. In addition to the marine wildlife, the shoreline provides food for a variety of shore birds, including the whimbrel, the western sandpiper, and the black turnstone.

The least tern sanctuary is a fenced enclosure about 2 1/2 acres in size. In 1974 the least tern, an endangered species, was known to nest along California's coastal beaches at only 16 sites from San Diego County to San Francisco Bay. It requires sandy areas protected from human disturbance. This species is endangered because of the restricted nature of its breeding grounds.

Future planning of the area should include the provision of better protection of these natural habitats from human activity.

Vegetation and Biotic Community

The sandy littoral biotic community is the only one present in the area. Due to beach cleaning efforts and sand removal where sand is deposited by the wind, vegetation is constantly being removed as it becomes established. The one exception to this is in the maintenance area at the downcoast extremity of the area. Here, a number of plant species are present, most of which are introduced. There are such species as sea rocket, iceplant, primrose, sand verbena, Bermuda grass, and tumbleweed. In general, this plant community as it is today is not a significant feature of the area, but some consideration might be given to allowing a certain portion of the area to come back to native species in order to preserve this biotic community and provide an interpretive program.

No rare or endangered plant species are known to occur at this beach.

Scenic Resource

The project area is within the South Coastal Strip Landscape Province.

Huntington State Beach is a flat, sandy beach that averages about 400 feet in width. There are scenic vistas up and down the coastline and views out to sea. On clear days, Santa Catalina Island can be seen from the beach.

The beach is a major viewing element in the scenic corridor of the Coast Highway, a scenic route so designated by the county. However, the beach view from the road is obscured by a chain link fence, and the ocean view is blocked by the high beach sand.
The California coastline is a visual resource that belongs to all the people of this state. The visual attractiveness of the coast contributes to a higher quality of life for coastal residents and visitors. As a part of this valuable resource, the visual quality of the beach should be restored and enhanced by giving aesthetic quality a high priority in future design and development of beach facilities.

Geologic Hazards

Flooding presents a potential geologic hazard in the area. The beach, like major portions of the City of Huntington Beach, is located in the Santa Ana River flood plain. While normal flood waters have been controlled with constructed channels, floods of greater magnitude, such as a 100-year-flood, would cause damage to the beach either from the flood waters or from the emergency channeling indicated in the county’s flood disaster plan.

Seismic activity is also a major geologic hazard in the area. A branch of the Newport-Inglewood Fault cuts across the southern portion of the beach. The fault is classified “potentially active.” Although surface rupture has apparently not occurred within the past 9,000 years, and the probability of rupture is relatively low within the next 100 years, the possibility of future seismic activity should be taken into consideration during the planning and design of any new improvements on the beach.

Archeological Resources

There are no known archeological sites in the beach area. Due to the constantly changing sand pattern between the winter depletion and summer accumulations, it is doubtful that any sites could have survived over a long period of time. Indian use would be expected at the mouth and lower reaches of a major stream, such as the Santa Ana River, but the mouth of this river has been relocated by engineering works for flood control purposes, so archeological values are not a factor at the present mouth of the river.

Historic Resources

While coastal southern California is rich in great historic values, none involve the immediate area within the narrow confines of this beach unit nor the areas nearby.

Climate

The area is typical of southern California, with a mild Mediterranean climate. Summer days are usually overcast in the morning until ten or eleven o’clock and clear up in the afternoon. Mild onshore breezes come up in the summer afternoons. Rainfall occurs in the winter, usually between October and May, with a peak occurring between December 1 and March 31. Seasonal precipitation is about 12 inches. Winter onshore winds are much stronger than those that prevail during the summer and can cause the sand to blow when they exceed 20 miles per hour. Occasionally, hot, dry, offshore winds from the desert areas are experienced in the late summer. These are known as “Santa Anas.”

The temperature is dominated by the ocean influence and is relatively constant. Average air temperature varies from 53°F in winter to 68°F in summer. The water temperature averages from a low of 56°F to a high of 65°F.

Air

The site is located in the south coast air basin. Here motor vehicles are the major source of air pollutants. However, the air quality of the coast is much superior to that of the inland area because the prevailing westerlies and the daily morning and afternoon shore breezes regularly refresh the coastal air.
Groundwater

The groundwater at the beach is at a shallow depth and is subject to tidal fluctuations. None of the groundwater in the beach is being tapped for domestic use because of its high saline content.

Allowable Use Intensity

The allowable use intensity conclusions, which are based on the resource analysis, are indicated on the allowable use intensity map. Use intensity signifies the number of persons per acre that can be allowed in an area at one time without causing irreparable damage to the natural resources being used and without detracting from the quality of the visitors' experience.

High Use Intensity

Except for the least tern sanctuary area, the entire beach is considered suitable for high use intensity. High use intensity means that no more than 435 persons per acre should be allowed on the beach at any one time, or that no less than 100 square feet of beach for each person should be allowed at any one time.

Special Restrictions

The least tern sanctuary site must be protected from human disturbance and predation. All activities will be restricted and limited to observation from outside the fence only. It is being proposed that the tern sanctuary be enlarged downcoast and toward the ocean to include their social flocking area, which in turn will give more protection to the nesting birds.
CHAPTER III
RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

As indicated in the resource inventory for the unit, Huntington State Beach is a sandy ocean
beach extending from the mouth of the Santa Ana River upcoast for a distance of approximately
two miles. The Inland boundary is the Pacific Coast Highway. The unit is a relatively long and
narrow sandy beach. Biological values are generally insignificant, except for an important nesting
area of the least tern near the mouth of the Santa Ana River.

The land area of the state beach is 78.48 acres. Unit resources are best adapted to beach
recreation activities, which include swimming, sunbathing, picnicking, walking and beachcombing,
surfing, fishing, sightseeing, and wildlife observation. A portion of the beach resource has been used
for the development of parking lots and other facilities, as no other area is available for these
purposes.

Since the present land ownership is almost entirely sandy beach, natural vegetation is generally
lacking, except in areas of very low public use. There is little danger of damage to the environment
from public recreation activities; accordingly, resource management and protection efforts are
minimal.

A rock groin at the mouth of the Santa Ana River has the effect of capturing the downcoast
littoral drift of sand, which thus tends to build up the state beach at the expense of Newport Beach
to the southeast.

A chain link fence enclosing an area of approximately two and a half acres is provided to
protect a nesting area for the endangered least tern. Research suggests that this tern nesting
sanctuary could be improved by doubling its size. This could be accomplished by extending its
boundaries both downcoast and towards the ocean. These actions would improve the social flocking
area of the tern and thus make it more attractive to the birds for their nesting activities. The total
area of the tern sanctuary would then be about five acres. The tern sanctuary was classified as a
natural preserve by the State Park and Recreation Commission on July 11, 1975.

Huntington State Beach lies in the South Coast Ecological Region. Geologically, the beach is
classified as an ocean strand. It is believed that in pristine times Huntington Beach would have been
an ocean strand backed by a low coastal dune. Behind the dunes but outside the present state
ownership was a large marsh area with many sloughs. Most of this marsh area has been reclaimed
and developed so that very little still remains. This marsh and slough area was a home for many
birds and animals.

The least terns, which nest on sandy areas containing shell fragments near rivers and near
lagoons or sloughs that support a fishery, may not have nested here originally since the mouth of
the river was downcoast from its present location. The lack of un molested sandy areas in southern
California is one of the reasons that the least tern is now on the endangered species list. This nesting
area could subject to abandonment at any time. In 1974 there were only five pairs nesting in the
area, a figure that was down from more than 16 pairs in 1973. If the Santa Ana River mouth or
some of the canals nearby should no longer support a fishery suitable for the terns, the birds could
easily attempt to move to some new site.

The ocean strand still exists, but the sand dune area and its vegetative component have been
leveled by development. The marsh has largely been filled, and only a fraction of it still exists.

With the leveling of the dunes and the removal of drifting sand, native vegetation is very sparse,
and most of the plants found in this area are now exotic. The disturbance of the dunes and the
vegetation has had an effect on the animal population. A still greater reduction of animal species
and numbers has occurred in the depleted marsh area.

Declaration of Purpose

There are two prime resources at Huntington State Beach: the sandy beach, with its recreation
potential and scenic values; and the nesting area for the endangered least tern near the mouth of the
Santa Ana River.
The purpose of Huntington State Beach is to provide for the perpetuation of the sandy beach as a resource for public outdoor recreation; to preserve its scenic and recreation qualities; to perpetuate the nesting area of the least tern; and to interpret these values to visitors for their better understanding and appreciation.

Declaration of Resource Management Policy

The resource management policy at Huntington State Beach has as its primary objective the maintenance of a recreation environment of the highest possible quality. The scenic values of the beach and ocean should not be impaired, and this must be a major consideration in any development contemplated. All management activities must be directed to achieving optimum public recreation enjoyment and understanding of the beach, the ocean, and the related scenic and natural values.

To enhance the enjoyment of the beach by visitors, appropriate species should be planted to screen the effects of noise from the highway and from adjacent parking areas.

Excluding the tern nesting area, the maximum amount of sandy beach should be maintained in an open condition to be available for public recreation use. A minimal portion should be converted to parking space and other development.

The amount of soil material, humus, fertilizer, and other plant-growing media imported into the area should be limited to prevent contamination of the beach sand. High tides combined with storm action could subject the beach area to wave action, and this could cause an undesirable mixing of soil materials with the beach sand.

The amount of fill or base required for parking lots or other developments should also be held to a minimum. Thus, if future demands require that these areas be allowed to revert to beach, this could be accomplished without unnecessary difficulty.

In the management of the tern nesting area, the objective will be to enhance the area in every way possible to make it attractive to the terns. This can be done by enlarging the tern sanctuary to include the social flocking area; by making the tern sanctuary a natural preserve; by making every effort to maintain the fishery in adjacent river and estuarine waters; and by making sure that the garbage collection station at the maintenance area north of the tern sanctuary is not attracting predatory birds that could be harmful to the nesting terns.

The present program of reducing annual vegetation in the nesting area and disturbing the sand surface prior to the nesting season will be continued, as the conditions produced by these activities are required by the terns. The public will be kept out of the tern sanctuary. The lands adjacent to the tern nesting and flocking areas toward the Santa Ana River will be encouraged to revert to native plant species.

The biotic features of the unit are largely self-sustaining except in connection with the tern sanctuary.

There are no known significant cultural features within Huntington State Beach.
CHAPTER IV
GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Need for the Project

The existing Huntington State Beach facilities that were constructed in 1950 can no longer meet today's recreation demand. Existing parking facilities are inadequate resulting in over 46,000 visitors being turned away each summer season. Limited available parking causes many visitors to park their cars along the highway and surface streets resulting in traffic congestion and producing a hazardous pedestrian situation. The existing sewer leaching fields are being used beyond design capacity and, as a result, threaten to pollute the beach. The redevelopment of this beach is needed to satisfy a larger portion of the present recreation demand, a demand that is expected to increase by 48 percent between 1970 and 1990.

Planned Development

The preparation of this General Development Plan was closely coordinated with the City of Huntington Beach. It incorporates recommendations made by the city's staff during joint planning meetings and in its Committee Report of September 5, 1975.

Major elements of the plan include the use of adjacent CALTRANS' land for parking expansion and the relocation of the administration and maintenance facilities inland of the Pacific Coast Highway.

Proposals included in the plan are:

1. **Expand the parking capacity**
   At 100 square feet per person, the state beach can accommodate 30,000 people at one time. The present parking capacity of 1,200 cars accommodates 4,800 people. The expanded parking will be constructed on the 70-foot-wide strip of CALTRANS' right of way located between the existing parking facilities and the Pacific Coast Highway. The parking provided by expansion and renovation of the existing parking area will accommodate a total of 3,300 cars and 27 buses (14,000 people).

2. **Develop additional entrances**
   All vehicles at Huntington State Beach now enter and exit at Beach Boulevard. Beach Boulevard is also an access point to a parking lot that serves the city beach. During many summer afternoons this intersection becomes critically congested. To alleviate this problem and to accommodate the proposed increased parking, additional entrances will be constructed.

   The proposed additional entrances will be located at Newland, Magnolia, and Brookhurst Streets. All four entrances will accommodate car and bus access, passenger loading and unloading, car and bus turn-around, and bike-in and walk-in access.

3. **Replace comfort stations, lifeguard tower, and concession buildings**
   The existing restroom facilities are worn out and in need of constant repair. The present sewage leach fields are being used far beyond the original design capacity posing a threat of possible beach pollution. These restrooms will be replaced with new restroom facilities, which will include dressing rooms. A sewage disposal system will be developed that will either connect to the local treatment plant or to a new, larger leaching system.

   The existing lifeguard tower is situated over one of the restroom buildings. The present lifeguard facilities are inadequate and the building requires a high degree of maintenance. A new lifeguard tower is proposed that will include a park office.
The Area Administration Office will be separated from the park office and will be included with the maintenance facilities to be relocated inland of the Pacific Coast Highway. Like the other buildings in this unit, the park office and the maintenance buildings are old and inadequate. The maintenance buildings and yard infringe on the tern sanctuary.

New concession buildings for beach rental and food services will be conveniently located close to the entrances. These facilities will be operated by private concessionaires.

4. **Introduce Landscape plantings**
   Plantings will be located around the concession and restroom buildings and will emphasize the natural quality of the beach. The vegetation selected for planting will be tolerant of the severe ocean exposure. Approximately two acres of turf will be planted on the oceanside of the southernmost parking area. This is the area that will be proposed for off-season camping use.

   All the planted areas will be irrigated.

5. **Install camping and trailer sanitation stations**
   Provisions will be made to accommodate off-season camping in the most southerly parking lot. Facilities will include two trailer sanitation stations to service recreation vehicle campers.

6. **Develop information and interpretive facilities**
   The proposed interpretive facilities will include panels and display structures. They will be located near the passenger loading and unloading areas to explain coastal ecology and provide public service information.

7. **Expand the least tern sanctuary**
   The present sanctuary is a fenced area roughly 600 feet long and 200 feet wide. It is located on the beach adjacent to the mouth of the Santa Ana River. The least terns, an endangered species, have been found to nest mostly in a small portion of the middle of the sanctuary where they are least disturbed by beach users. The size of the sanctuary will be expanded to offer better protection for the nesting birds and to encourage increased nesting.

8. **Develop a bike trail and promenade.**
   A combination bike trail/promenade will provide a direct connection between the Santa Ana River bike trail and the city's beach bike trail system. It will run the length of the beach and will be located on the beachside of the parking lots.

9. **Install night lighting.**
   Night lighting is needed for the safety and convenience of the visitors. The beach is very popular for evening beach parties, bonfires and fishing. Appropriate lighting systems will be installed at the comfort station, in the parking areas and along the bike trail/promenade.

10. **Modify utilities.**
    Electricity, telephone, gas, and water services are available on the site. Major utility modification will be underground placement of electrical and telephone cables.
Acquisition Recommendation

The acquisition of two adjacent parcels of land is necessary to solve traffic congestion problems, to accommodate additional parking, to provide for a desirable variety of public recreation opportunities, and to preserve open space and the wetlands environment at Huntington State Beach. These parcels are:

1. The 100 x 10,000 foot strip between the boundary fence and Pacific Coast Highway. This piece of property consists mainly of low sand dunes with patches of ice plant, beach primrose, sand verbena, and Bermuda grass. There are no known archeological sites or significant resources on this strip of property. The acquisition of this area would provide ownership of the land on which additional entrances and parking facilities have been planned.

2. The 85-acre parcel between the flood control channel and the Pacific Coast Highway. This area was once part of an 1,800-acre estuary and marsh complex. In spite of the modification caused by drain and fill operations for urbanization, some of the areas are still in a marsh condition because of saltwater seepage and rainwater runoff. Pickleweed and saltgrass cover most of the area. The Belding's savannah sparrow, an endangered species, has been seen in this area along with numerous shore birds and waterfowl. The acquisition of this parcel would make possible the restoration of the wetlands wildlife habitats and the development of interpretive facilities, and the provision of passive recreation opportunities.
Chapter V
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

This environmental impact report has been prepared in accordance with Section 21100 of the Public Resources Code. The report assesses the possible environmental impacts that would result in the redevelopment of Huntington State Beach.

The description of the project is contained in the preceding chapters of this report.

Environmental Impact of the Proposed Action

1. Impact on Wildlife Habitat
The least tern is an endangered species. The existing tern sanctuary will be expanded as a part of this project to provide better protection for the nesting area of the least tern.

The shortage of adequate parking space forces cars to park along the Pacific Coast Highway right-of-way, inland of the Highway. This area was once part of a large estuary/marsh complex and is still a natural wildlife habitat. Among the wildlife is the endangered Savannah sparrow. The proposal to expand the parking within the state beach might make possible the prohibition of parking on the Pacific Coast Highway right-of-way, thereby reducing the impact on the wildlife living in this area.

2. Impact on Visual Quality
The project will have both beneficial and adverse impacts on the visual quality of the area. The removal of overhead utilities and the chain link fence, the construction of new, improved facilities, and the introduction of landscape plantings will greatly improve the aesthetic appeal of the site. However, the expansion of parking lots onto the Pacific Coast Highway right-of-way property would change the natural open character of the corridor, and the parked cars would further obscure the beach view of the motorists on Pacific Coast Highway.

3. Impact on Air
Although the project involves adding 2,000 car parking spaces, the impact on the local air quality would not change significantly. The added spaces will be used by those who would otherwise park their cars on the city streets or drive to a further location if no additional parking were available. Some improvement of air quality is possible because the project provides facilities to accommodate buses and bicycles which will encourage people to use them rather than cars for transportation to the beach.

4. Impact on Groundwater
Existing sanitary facilities are using leach fields. The project will include either exporting sewage to existing treatment plants or new leach fields either of which will improve the groundwater quality on the beach. The additional paving for parking and roads will decrease the amount of rainwater penetration into the soil, which will probably cause some lowering of the existing fresh groundwater table.

5. Impact on Landform
The project will modify the landform of the area between the existing highway and beach parking lots. Parking lot construction will level and pave over the existing undulating sandy land form. Freeform mounds will be constructed around the concession and restroom areas.
Adverse Effects That Cannot Be Avoided
if the Proposal is Implemented

1. An increase in loads on the existing public sewer system will result if conversion is made from septic tank-leach lines to sewer disposal system.

2. An increase in water consumption because of the requirements for irrigating landscape plantings.

3. A modification of the undulating sandy land form because of parking lot expansion.

Mitigating Measures Proposed to Minimize This Impact

1. Expanding the least tern sanctuary.

2. Reducing the disturbance to the wildlife inland of Pacific Coast Highway by parking along the road right-of-way.

3. Reducing fuel consumption due to: 1) decreased numbers of cars driving around looking for a beach parking space; 2) decreased congestion on Pacific Coast Highway; 3) increased bus and bike accommodations.

4. Improving the quality of groundwater through the elimination of inadequate leaching of sewer effluent.

Alternatives to the Proposed Project

Several alternatives related to the development were considered:

1. **Build fewer beach parking spaces.**
   Huntington Beach is easy to get to by car, and it is a popular beach for many thousands of southern Californians. The fewer parking spaces provided for beach use the greater the parking on highway shoulders and city streets; all of which leads to congestion and increased fuel consumption.

2. **Build more beach parking spaces.**
   Additional parking spaces beyond those proposed would have to be constructed on the sandy beach since all the space between Pacific Coast Highway and the existing beach parking lots is already used in this project for additional parking. Increased parking across Pacific Coast Highway would infringe on the open space wildlife habitat inland of the highway. Increased parking in the City of Huntington Beach with bus shuttle service to the state beach is considered to be appropriate on peak use days and can be implemented by the local transit authority.

3. **Undertake no improvements.**
   The alternative of "no project" would fail to achieve any improvement, including enhancement of scenic and wildlife quality and enhancement of public use, access, and enjoyment of this sandy southern California beach.
Relationship Between Short-Term Use and Long-Term Productivity of the Environment

The proposed project is designed to provide facilities to accommodate the increasing number of beach-users and to improve the quality of the recreation and natural resources in the area. Therefore, the project is beneficial with respect to short-term use.

The long-term productivity of this area as a natural beach will be partially affected by this development.

Any Irreversible Environmental Changes as a Result of the Proposed Project

No irreversible changes.

Growth-Inducing Impact

The project will not alter the existing land use of the site and will not increase the residential population of the project area.
The project will not result in any substantial change in facilities and in land use.
The project could increase the use of an already popular beach. This is not growth-inducing because no expansion of utility systems is required outside the project boundaries. The population using the beach is transient and food and beverage service is provided within the development.