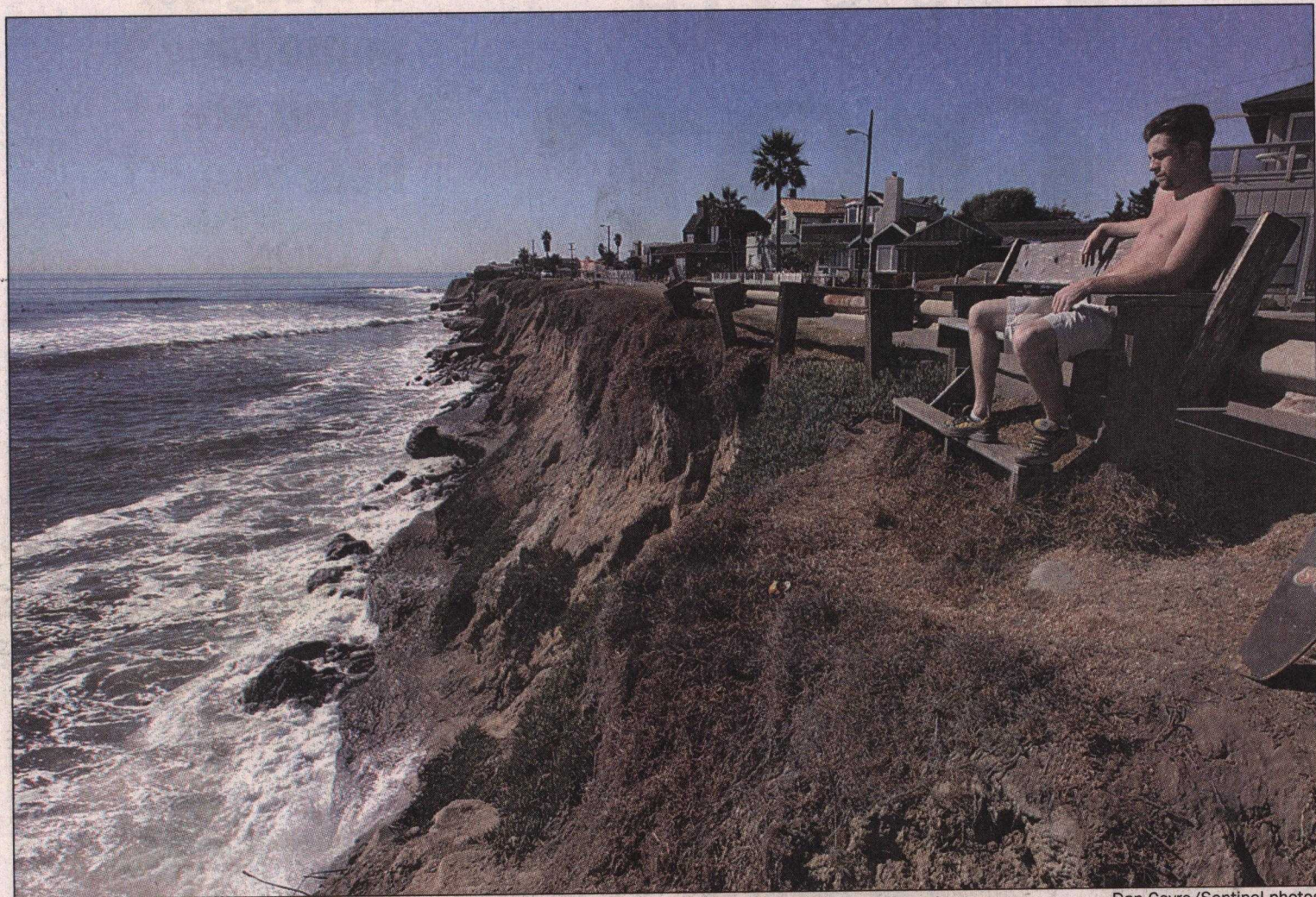


# Surf or Turf

## THE SEAWALL DEBATE

Land-stabilizing plan for Pleasure Point could threaten famed break



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Coastal erosion is visible along East Cliff Drive at Pleasure Point. A seawall is proposed to stop it, but the plan has opponents.

### ARMY CORPS SEAWALL WILL BE CONSIDERED ON FRIDAY

By BRIAN SEALS  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

✓ PLEASURE POINT — On any given day, black-suited surfers can be seen riding the famous waves here.

It's these waves, which seem to roll into mile-long rides, that make the surf break off East Cliff Drive world-renowned among surfers.

And that is part of the reason for the controversy over a years-in-the-making plan to stabilize the bluffs overlooking this point — with a 1,100-foot-long concrete wall stretching from 32nd to 36th avenues.

"There's no way to know what will happen (to the break)," said surfer Teresa Ish. But she and her surfing peers are concerned the seawall could diminish the wave action.

East Cliff Drive resident Jim Marshall also can't say for sure how the break would be affected. But he does know if the wall is not built, he not only stands to lose his home, the public stands to lose the cliff-top walkway, popular with bikers and pedestrians.

"It's a heavily used area. There are thousands of people who use it," Marshall said.



Pleasure Point neighbors take in the surf action from two cliffside benches that haven't given way to erosion yet.

The seawall plan is heading down the approval homestretch, with a California Coastal Commission hearing this week in Los Angeles, though the final say will rest with the county Board of Supervisors.

Most people would agree there is no perfect

See SEAWALL on PAGE A6

### Average rainfall expected along coast this winter

SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

Forecasters say this winter will be about average as far as precipitation and storms go.

"There are no unusual influences," said Diana Henderson of the National Weather Service in Monterey.

In past years, El Niño and La Niña patterns have had abnormal effects on local weather, sometimes causing winter storms to strike coastal areas with unusual strength.

Neither phenomenon is expected this year.

Average November rainfall in the Santa Cruz County area is about 4 inches, rising to an average 5.5 inches in December, then to 6.6 inches in January.

The National Weather Service's 2003-04 forecast says temperatures may be slightly warmer than usual in California and the West.



## SURF OR TURF

## STABILIZATION PROJECTS

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Waddell bluffs: 2,100 feet.   | 9. Twin Lakes Beach: 1,300 feet. (Schwann Lagoon to Black Point.)    |  |
| 2. Davenport Landing: 100 feet.  | 10. Black Point: 75 feet.  |  |
| 3. De Anza Mobile Estates: 100 feet.   | 11. Sunny Cove to Corcoran Lagoon: 825 feet.                         |  |
| 4. West Cliff Drive: 2,850 feet. (Natural Bridges State Park to Point Santa Cruz.) | 12. Corcoran Lagoon to Moran Lake: 1700 feet.                        |  |
| 5. Point Santa Cruz to Cowell Beach: 2,700 feet.                                   | 13. Moran Lake: 200 feet.  |  |
| 6. Dream Inn: 700 feet.  | 14. Moran Lake to Soquel Point: 800 feet.                            |  |
| 7. Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk: 3,000 feet.   | 15. Opal Cliffs Drive: 4,900 feet. (Soquel Point to Capitola Wharf.) |  |
| 8. Santa Cruz harbor entrance: west jetty, 1,350 feet; east jetty, 750 feet.       | 16. Capitola Beach: 1,000 feet.                                      |  |
|  | 17. Capitola Bluff to  |  |
|  | 18. Potbelly Beach: 950 feet.  |  |
|  | 19. Seacliff State Beach: 5,200 feet.                                |  |
|  | 20. Manresa State Beach: 900 feet.                                   |  |
|  | 21. Pajaro Dunes/Pajaro River: 7,500 feet.                           |  |
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\* The listing includes projects counted in a 1993 California Coastal Commission study and may not include smaller projects.

Source: California Coastal Commission

## Armoring the coast

To prevent coastal erosion, both private and publicly funded seawalls have been built along the Santa Cruz County coast. Estimates suggest about 30 percent of the county's coastline is armored.

## Proposed Pleasure Point seawall

## Seawall

Continued from Page A1

plan for Pleasure Point, but they know something must be done about its crumbling cliffs.

Camps are generally divided into those who support the seawall, noting the recreation and economic value of the point, those who say nature should be left to run its course and others who advocate for some middle ground.

The sheer size and government backing of a Pleasure Point seawall make it a high-stakes debate. But seawalls have been built piecemeal along the coastline for years.

There are at least 21 seawalls in Santa Cruz County already, and estimates suggest about 30 percent of the county's coast is armored. Some type of armoring can be seen almost continuously from West Cliff Drive to Capitola, and even in the New Brighton and Seacliff areas. More walls are likely.

The Pleasure Point project is scheduled to be followed by a smaller seawall at the end of 41st Avenue at a popular surf area known as the Hook. About a dozen private projects are also pending from homeowners wanting to refurbish existing walls, said the Coastal Commission's Dan Carl.

Beyond the high profile of Pleasure Point, the issues surrounding the seawall debate are the same as elsewhere.

The bluff is eroding at a rate of about 1 foot per year, inching closer to East Cliff Drive, threatening the road and underground sewage line beneath; residents worry about their homes perched nearby. The well-trodden recreation path, with its famous views of the Monterey Bay, is also threatened.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Barriers on East Cliff Drive keep pedestrians away from cliff sections that have fallen away.

Institute for Marine Science.

Original estimates of a \$5 million project have more recently been pegged at \$7 million. Under the former estimate, the Corps of Engineers would pay about \$3 million, with the county kicking in \$2 million — half of that county redevelopment money and half from a state grant.

That price tag has infused a little class warfare into the debate. Critics say the money is being spent to protect expensive coastal homes, but supporters, again, say the wall benefits the thousands of people who ride the paths and surf the waves, not just the homeowners.

Typically, seawalls have been privately built by the homeowners

## Different perspectives

Supporters say the plan to save the road and bluffs needs to proceed.

"(The proposed wall) is admittedly Disneyland-esque, but it's better than letting the cliff fall in," said resident Marshall, whose home fronts the eroding bluff.

Roughly a dozen homes face East Cliff Drive in the area, and for some, the project is long overdue. "It should have been done quite some time ago," said 32nd Avenue resident Dave Vidnovic.

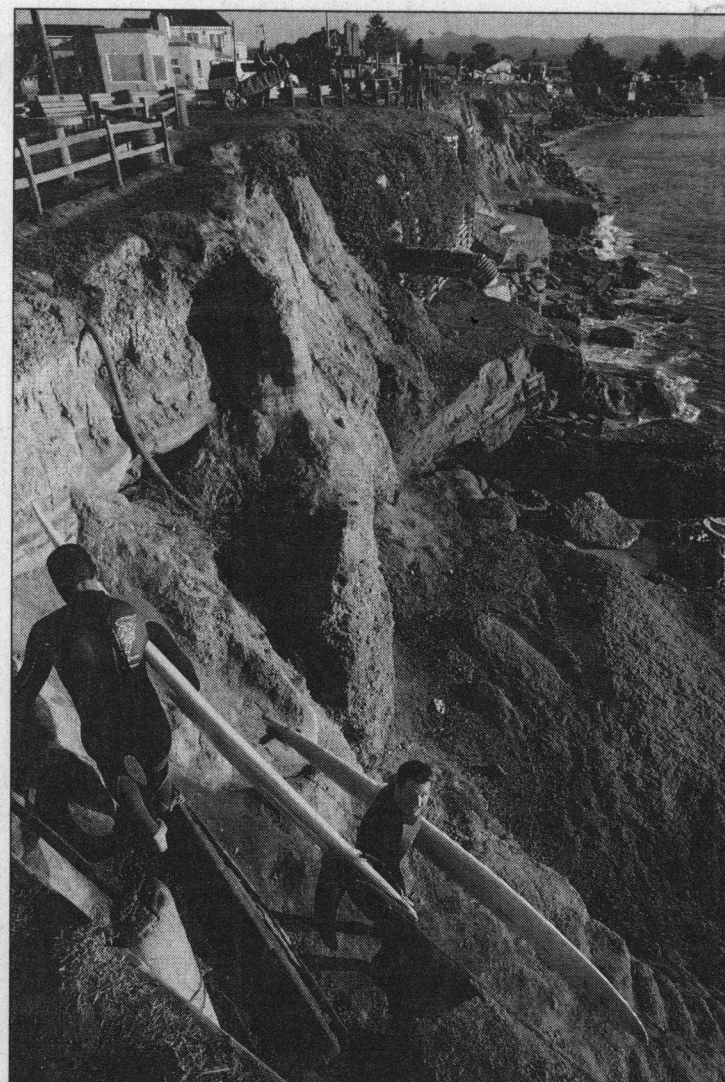
Ray Conti, president of the neighborhood group Pleasure Point Night Fighters, said he has mixed views on the project, but

the sea-bottom configuration of topography, rock and sand, than what goes on along the shore.

Griggs also doubts speculation that a seawall at Pleasure Point would speed up erosion of nearby beaches.

The proposed wall would border an existing private wall to the north, he explained, and other forms of armoring are plentiful south toward Capitola, leaving little other beach to erode.

Still, critics of the seawall plan say there are better ways to address erosion and say these alternatives were not considered by the Corps of Engineers.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Surfers make their way down a narrow path on a section of cliffs along East Cliff Drive in Pleasure Point, where a seawall may be built.

The Surfrider Foundation says obvious, earth-friendly approaches were ignored, like using vegetation to stabilize the top of the bluff and setting weight limits on traffic on the now one-way road.

"I can't see why they wouldn't explore more natural methods," said Eric Russell of the Surfrider Santa Cruz chapter.

The low-impact, less-costly options should at least be given a chance, seawall opponents say. If they fail, then the seawall option should be considered.

Mark Massara, who monitors coastal activity for the Sierra Club, calls East Cliff Drive an "unnecessary" road, when compared to the natural habitat. He says a seawall shouldn't supplant the coast's natural processes.

Massara also says the environmental report did not sufficiently address the issue of whether the surf break would be preserved.

Some Coastal Commission staff

members say they wished the Corps of Engineers could have explored more options, but didn't expect it to go beyond its tried methods.

"For better or worse, they chose not to look at (alternatives)," said the Coastal Commission's Carl.

Nonetheless, the Coastal Commission staff is recommending its board approve the project, though it has asked for a string of conditions that would slightly alter construction and call for monitoring the impacts.

The seawall plan is scheduled to be voted on by the California Coastal Commission at its Friday meeting in Los Angeles. The ultimate decision rests with the county Board of Supervisors, which could take up the issue as early as December, or possibly early next year.

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refurbish existing walls, said the Coastal Commission's Dan Carl.

Beyond the high profile of Pleasure Point, the issues surrounding the seawall debate are the same as elsewhere.

The bluff is eroding at a rate of about 1 foot per year, inching closer to East Cliff Drive, threatening the road and underground sewage line beneath; residents worry about their homes perched nearby. The well-trodden recreation path, with its famous views of the Monterey Bay, is also threatened.

But the seawall plan raises concerns for environmentalists, who say armoring the coastline is a temporary fix that only results in a need for more seawalls; Building a wall typically displaces wave energy, which can mean accelerating erosion of nearby beaches.

Moreover, in the case of Pleasure Point, some are worried that, over time, the wall could set in motion processes that would rob the point of its famed surf break.

## The wall

The plan that will go before the Coastal Commission this week calls for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build the seawall and share the cost with the county.

After the Corps of Engineers considered four alternatives, a four block-long, all-concrete wall was deemed the most effective way to address the erosion. It was the only plan that, after 50 years, would likely keep the road from crumbling into the sea, according to the project's environmental report.

The wall would bring the bluff back to the point it was two years ago, said Gary Griggs, geologist and director of UC Santa Cruz

Engineers would pay about \$3 million, with the county kicking in \$2 million — half of that county redevelopment money and half from a state grant.

That price tag has infused a little class warfare into the debate. Critics say the money is being spent to protect expensive coastal homes, but supporters, again, say the wall benefits the thousands of people who ride the paths and surf the waves, not just the homeowners.

Typically, seawalls have been privately built by the homeowners seeking to protect their houses. But the county does have some history with the structures, having built a seawall near Aptos Beach Road and a small one near Larch Lane in recent years.

County officials say as far as aesthetics go, the proposed seawall at Pleasure Point would look natural. Redevelopment Agency director Tom Burns said the "shotcrete," a mix meant to look like natural rock, would curve with the natural features of the bluff.

"This is not like any seawall project that has been built in this area," Burns said.

County officials, who initiated plans for the seawall, say in an urbanized area like Pleasure Point, packed with houses and filled with activity, a wall is the best option.

"We're no fans of huge seawalls," said Burns. "We wish we could be somewhere where you could move things. If this road is lost, our access is lost forever."

The proposed wall is teddy Disneyland-esque, but it's better than letting the cliff fall in," said resident Marshall, whose home fronts the eroding bluff.

Roughly a dozen homes face East Cliff Drive in the area, and for some, the project is long overdue.

"It should have been done quite some time ago," said 32nd Avenue resident Dave Vidnovic.

Ray Conti, president of the neighborhood group Pleasure Point Night Fighters, said he has mixed views on the project, but generally supports preserving the access that East Cliff Drive offers. He said it's especially important for fire trucks and ambulances that are occasionally called out to treat an injured surfer or biker.

"Service vehicles have to get in and out of there," Conti said.

Surf concerns are also part of the debate. About a half-dozen surfing events are held at the point each year. A study by CSU Monterey Bay student Charles Tilley estimated the surf spot's economic impact at \$8.4 million annually.

Most geology reports, though, say the surf break won't be harmed, but many surfers say this can't be confirmed.

"Our climate future is pretty uncertain. We don't know what it will be like in 50 or 100 years," said Ish, who works with environmental group Surfrider Foundation.

UCSC's Griggs said features could change over time with or without a seawall. And he added that waves are more a function of

beaches.

The proposed wall would border an existing private wall to the north, he explained, and other forms of armoring are plentiful south toward Capitola, leaving little other beach to erode.

Still, critics of the seawall plan say there are better ways to address erosion and say these alternatives were not considered by the Corps of Engineers.

Mark Massara, vice president of coastal activity for the Sierra Club, calls East Cliff Drive an "unnecessary" road, when compared to the natural habitat. He says a seawall shouldn't supplant the coast's natural processes.

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Some Coastal Commission staff

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