

# On keeping the Pacific Ocean at bay

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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz, take heart. There are other harbors in the country with shoaling problems.

"That problem occurs just about everywhere you've got an inlet harbor," sighed Kenneth R. Melson, superintendent of the Virginia Beach Erosion Control Commission after viewing the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor Thursday.

Melson should know. For the past 30 years, he said, he's been in charge of the year-round dredging operation that keeps the Virginia Beach, Va., harbor open. Total yearly cost is \$1.5 million, but that's offset, he said, by the \$14 million in taxes returned on the adjacent three-mile long beach he's also charged with maintaining.

Melson is among the nearly 100 people attending the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association convention at the Dream Inn, which concludes today. The non-profit group is an amalgam of consultants, engineers, oceanographers, government employees and beach lovers who came for a symposium on "Our beaches: Where did they go? Can they come back?"

Thursday afternoon, two busloads of conventioners surveyed the Santa Cruz coast from Natural Bridges to Seascape,

stopping along the way to hear tales of long-term erosion and of the damage wrought by successive winters of heavy storms. They also heard about the protective steps taken by local residents to maintain their eroding beaches.

Government and private companies are not always in accord on what's best for the coastline, but Bill Allayaud of the state Coastal Commission said the conference had shown how close these people actually work together.

"One theme we've heard repeated throughout the presentations is the cooperation between government agencies and consultants," said Allayaud.

An example of that cooperation was discussed by Gene Miller, engineer with the San Francisco-based consulting firm of Harlan, Miller and Tait Associates, designer of the Via Gaviota seawall at Seascape.

"There was a tremendous cooperative effort between the county and Coastal Commission on this," said Miller as he pointed to the 1,107-foot long seawall.

The seawall was "fast-tracked," erected in just 10 months after the January and February 1983 storms damaged 22 homes. Construction was financed by the homeowners, Seascape Corp., and insurance companies at a cost of \$2 million, said Miller.

One legal question arose over the issue of public access, said Miller. The Coastal Commission sued but dropped its lawsuit after the residents agreed to provide stairways through the seawall and a walkway around the base of it.

Miller said the seawall has an engineering life of 50 years, and a 129-year "oceanography life" based on the storm history of the beach.

For all its impressive engineering, the Via Gaviota seawall left some observers skeptical about its effectiveness in the kind of storms that ravaged the county in 1982 and '83.

Said one woman, "I want to see what this looks like next year, after the winter."

The seawall struck Clark Muldavin, senior civil engineer with the state Department of Parks and Recreation, differently.

Muldavin looked on the seawall with a tinge of envy. His agency is charged with rebuilding the Seacliff State Beach lower parking lot and 26-space RV park, north of Via Gaviota. Bids on that project are going out later this month, he said.

Muldavin, in response to a question, said he'd love for the state Legislature to give him enough money to build the kind of seawall as the one at Via Gaviota. How-

ever the cost would far exceed the \$150-per-foot cost that's been set aside for the project. If built similar to the Via Gaviota seawall — which cost \$1,500 per foot — the final bill would be close to \$7.5 million. That's about \$7 million more than what the Seacliff project is expected to cost, he noted.

In the past 60 years, the Seacliff area has been partially or completely destroyed by winter storms nine times. After each storm, it's been rebuilt to the same specifications as the last time.

Opinions were clearly mixed from the members of the beach association as to whether more money should be pumped into the repair of this parking lot.

Mixed comments were also heard at the Rio del Mar seawall, where George Armstrong, supervisor with the California Department of Boating and Waterways, told of the federal and state effort in 1982 to rebuild that failing wall.

Armstrong told of the success of the seawall during the 1983 storm, then chided the Parks and Rec department for failing to build an adequate handicapped access to the beach. It was destroyed, along with a substantial part of the parking lot.

Muldavin, of Parks and Rec, took the bullhorn to explain that his agency was forced by the Coastal Commission to build the ramp, although he said he couldn't understand why.

Further up the coast, E. Cliff Drive resident Ed Flavell talked about the loss of beach in front of his home and the residents' efforts to build a rip-rap wall to preserve their eroding cliffs. Not coincidentally, he said, the beach disappeared after the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor was built.

Even though the afternoon was punctuated with these kinds of digs, they were all taken good-heartedly. The members agreed they're working on a common goal to preserve the country's coasts.

LEFT — Tyler Swetnam of Virginia looks at damage from past storm at Rio del Mar beach, part of Seacliff State Beach.

RIGHT — Tour members stand above an old ramp for the handicapped at Rio del Mar beach



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