



JOSEPH A. GARCIA/THE STAR

The line of erosion at Hueneme Beach.

Sand loss response unacceptable

Re: Charles Lester's June 15 guest column, "Rocks alone not erosion solution":

The guest column by the California Coastal Commission's executive director, while factually correct, is completely off point. Reading his words, I can only come to the troubling conclusion that the orders and issuing direction with no clear understanding of the actual conditions at Hueneme Beach.

Hueneme Beach is unique in that the daily erosion we experience is not due to natural causes — storms or sea level rise — but by the jetties at the Port of Hueneme, which block the normal flow of sand.

It is meaningless to talk about a natural shoreline when the entire beachfront and most of the Surfside neighborhood is a man-made recreation fashioned from the dredge spoils of Channel Islands Harbor.

Some 1.2 million cubic yards of sand wash off our beach every year. The Army Corps of Engineers determined that the most effective remedy for this erosion was to replenish the lost sand from a sand

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trap they built at Channel Islands Harbor.

The Corps of Engineers, however, never imagined that Congress would renege on its responsibility to provide funding to actually move the sand. As a consequence of this congressional failure, Hueneme Beach is experiencing the worst erosion it has had since the restoration of the beach in 1960.

Earlier this year, our state senator, Hannah-Beth Jackson, was able, through a feat of legislative legerdemain, to secure \$2 million in state funding to provide emergency protection for Surfside Drive. This funding is dependent upon getting a permit from the Coastal Commission — a not unreasonable requirement.

Rather than permit the entire 900 feet all at once, commission staff preferred to piecemeal the project into 100-foot lengths. City staff thought it had an understanding with commission staff (a "verbal agreement") that would trigger the issuance of an emergency permit

from the Coastal Commission.

This was the case for the first two installments. However, when the city went back for the third installment, commission staff was not so understanding. In fact, the day before the sand wall failure, Steve Hudson, the commission's regional director, told us that he did not believe that we had a "real emergency."

Instead of issuing the emergency permit as staff had done twice before, it now requested further study of different options. To consider all possible options is due diligence. To go back and study them again and again hoping for a different conclusion is madness.

Lester states in his guest column that "back passing" sand from down-coast beaches ... is a common technique." And so it is. It's just the wrong technique for Hueneme Beach.

Why is back passing wrong for Hueneme Beach? The rate of erosion is about 100,000 cubic yards of sand per month. To move 100,000 cubic yards of sand would take a fleet of dump trucks running 10 hours a day, five days a week for a month.

When the month was

up, they'd have to start all over again to keep up with the following month's erosion. All those trucks would have a significant impact on air quality, not to mention noise and problems for pedestrians.

And, by the way, the sand would be coming from a sensitive habitat area.

Lester also discusses replenishment techniques, sea level rise, local coastal plans and grant opportunities. What he does not address is any responsibility that commission staff may bear for the catastrophic failure on Surfside Drive.

Over a month ago, I invited Lester and his staff, including Hudson, to attend a Port Hueneme City Council meeting at their convenience to discuss how and why this failure occurred. I have yet to receive a response.

Lester says he's not interested in "finger pointing" and neither am I. But I do demand accountability. A quarter million taxpayer dollars literally washed out to sea, while commission staff dithered.

I'm sorry, but "Oh, well," is not an acceptable response.

Jonathan Sharkey is mayor of the city of Port Hueneme.



ROB VARELA/THE STAR

Two Granite Construction excavators prepare an area of Hueneme Beach last month for a wall of boulders.

Rocks alone not erosion solution

The California Coastal Commission has grappled with coastal erosion for more than 40 years to assure that development is intelligently planned and the public's right to coastal access is protected.

On April 28, the commission issued the third in a series of emergency permits to the city of Port Hueneme, allowing 13,000 tons of boulders on 600 feet of public beach between Surfside Drive and the sea, to protect the roadway from erosion. Over the past year, commission staff has worked closely with city staff to address beach erosion in a way that wouldn't permanently impact beach access.

On May 21, Star columnist Beverly Kelley published a forceful critique of commission staff, asserting staff had delayed the project to explore "futile, infeasible alternatives." Kelley blamed the commission for the ensuing damage and costs from a late season storm over the April 26 weekend.

Members of the public get understandably frustrated with government when they don't have all the facts.

Throughout April, the commission and the city had been in close communication to define the project. Given that rock revetments eliminate public beach area, exacerbate coastal erosion and create hazards for recreational

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users, the commission must carefully balance needs to protect critical infrastructure with obligations to protect public access and recreation.

This analysis requires consideration of alternatives that could be more protective of the environment. The practice of "back passing" sand from down-coast beaches to build up narrower sections is a common technique for maintaining beaches that are routinely renourished. This alternative was technically feasible but determined by the city to be infeasible in this case due to funding and timing issues.

The final project approved by commission staff authorized 200 feet of new rock to be installed immediately. It also required the city to open up more sandy beach area for public use by relocating approximately 400 feet of old rock revetment that had been previously placed in the surf zone. This is an improvement for beach users and an environmental benefit.

Unfortunately, a late season high-tide/wave event that weekend caused additional shoreline damage. But the commission had already authorized the emergency rock work before the damage occurred

— not in response to it as Kelley alleged in her column.

In fact, on April 25, commission staff verbally granted the city's community development director full authorization to immediately proceed with the emergency work. Even though the city was given the green light to begin immediately, the city informed commission staff that it wasn't ready to start the project because it was still making arrangements to obtain the rock necessary to do the work.

Given that the city was not prepared to begin the emergency work until the following week and because the city was in the process of preparing revised plans defining the final scope of the project, commission and city staff agreed that the formal permit would be issued May 28.

But all the finger-pointing about permits and timing obscures a deeper challenge. Seas are rising and coastal communities must start planning how to adapt to this unfolding reality.

Port Hueneme is not alone in facing these threats — every coastal city and county is grappling with how to protect critical infrastructure and property from sea level rise.

Rock revetments can be erected quickly, but if installed along every threatened stretch of California's

entire 1,100 miles of coast, they will not just devastate our coastal environment; they will displace much of the beach area that is a critical driver in the state's multibillion-dollar beach recreational economy. Dumping rocks between us and the ocean is not a sustainable solution.

That's why the commission has made \$2 million in grant funding approved by the Brown administration and Legislature available to local governments to complete and update their local coastal plans. For the same cost as 600 feet of rocks, the commission is funding multiple cities and counties from San Diego to Eureka to explore proactive steps to avoid the predictable damage from sea level rise.

The world has changed a lot since Port Hueneme's plan was approved in 1984; and like many LCPs it should be updated. Rather than placing more and more rocks in emergency response, we need to commit to a more proactive approach to preserving our magnificent coastal legacy for future generations.

The commission stands ready to work with Port Hueneme — and other coastal jurisdictions to the best of its abilities — to address this growing and shared challenge along our coast.

Charles Lester is executive director of the California Coastal Commission.