

Attachment A

Final GPUSC/GPAC Draft Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element

Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element



HARBOR, BAY, & BEACHES

PURPOSE

The Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element guides the preservation and enhancement of water-dependent recreational and commercial activities and uses along the beaches and in Newport Bay, which includes Upper Newport Bay and Newport Harbor in Lower Newport Bay.

OVERVIEW

The Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element builds on the adopted General Plan’s vision of balancing the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors while ensuring that Newport Bay and Newport Harbor are accessible and preserved, offer recreational opportunities, and support the local economy. The harbor, bay, and beaches in Newport Beach support substantial economic opportunities and activity that are vital to the City’s economy. The Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element addresses a wide range of topics, including land and water uses; harbor coordination and administration; the economic value of the harbor, bay and beaches; public access to coastal resources; and coastal ecosystems.

The Harbor, Bay, and Beaches Element is coordinated with the Natural Resources Element, Recreation Element, Safety Element, and Land Use Element to support the preservation of water-dependent recreational and commercial activities.

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

Land and Water Use

Diversity of Land Uses

Newport Beach offers a diversity of water use opportunities to support recreation on Newport Bay and the wider Pacific Ocean. Recreational and boating activities include sailing, use of motorized and human-powered vessels, and other activities. Vessels can be used for cruising, racing, and other competitive activities, or for angling. Angling can also be enjoyed from many public docks and other locations throughout Newport Harbor. Vessels can be secured to docks, slips, or mooring buoys in the harbor. There are also vessel storage facilities in off-water locations. As of 2024, Newport Harbor featured approximately 1,200 moorings spread across 10 offshore fields,¹ the Balboa Peninsula, Balboa Island and Lido Isle, and in West Newport. There are 15 public docks and one commercial public wharf within the harbor.^{2,3} There are approximately 1,100 docks and several commercial marinas.⁴ Additionally, dry storage facilities are available for boats on trailers, stands, and racks at various locations. Recreational and commercial use of Newport Bay and Newport Harbor depend on prioritizing water quality and safety, as well as coastal-dependent uses and coastal-related uses, such as chandleries;⁵ service yards; boating launches, storage, and rentals; tourism-serving uses and recreation; habitat; and scenic areas. Scenic areas

¹ Nguyen, Lilly. “Pilot Program for Mooring Changes to Go to State Coastal Commission.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2023.

² City of Newport Beach. “City Celebrates Opening of New Public Dock, Welcomes First Electric Patrol Vessel Among U.S. Public Agencies.” News release, August 27, 2024.

³ City of Newport Beach. “Commercial Rhine Wharf Use Permit.”

⁴ California State Lands Commission. Assembly Bill 691 Summary – Newport Beach.

<https://slcprdwordpressstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpressdata/2022/09/ab691-summary-newportbeach.pdf>

⁵ A chandlery is a store or business selling maritime supplies.

and visual resources are further discussed in the Natural Resources Element and are shown in Figure NR-4, Viewpoints and Corridors. Visual resources include viewpoints and corridors that provide scenic views and are considered to be of public importance.

Recreational, commercial, water-dependent, and tourism-serving uses contribute to the local economy, resident and visitor activities, and the character of the community. Attracting tourism while preserving the unique character of coastal neighborhoods is key to maintaining Newport Beach’s charm and appeal. This includes maintaining architectural components that match Newport Beach’s character, as well as protecting coastal-dependent uses, local businesses, and coastal resources. By supporting a tourism industry that celebrates Newport Beach’s cultural and historical resources and community feeling, the City of Newport Beach (City) can create an attractive environment for residents and visitors alike.

Goal HBB-1: Local businesses and water-dependent commercial uses in the Newport Harbor area that are preserved to maintain and enhance the economic activity charm of the waterfront community

Policy HBB-1.1: Water-Dependent Uses. Preserve and enhance the following uses that contribute to the diversity and charm of Newport Bay, including Upper Newport Bay, and the balance among them:

- Water-dependent and water-related recreational activities, such as boating, sailing, wind surfing, angling, kayaking, rowing, paddle boarding, and swimming.
- Water-dependent and water-related commercial activities, such as passenger/sightseeing boats, passenger fishing boats (“day boats”), boat rentals and sales, entertainment boats, boat/ship repair and maintenance (shipyards), and harbor maintenance facilities.
- Water-enhanced commercial uses, such as restaurants and retail stores.
- Water-related public recreation and education areas and facilities, such as beaches, piers, view parks, and related public areas providing access to and views of Newport Harbor.
- Coastal residential communities. (Imp. 2.1, 14.3, 14.6, 21.1, 24.1)

Policy HBB-1.2: New Development. Site and design new development to avoid significant impacts to existing and potential water-dependent and water-related uses. (Imp. 2.1, 7.1, 8.1)

Policy HBB-1.3: Land Use Considerations. Consider the impact on water-dependent and water-related land uses when reviewing proposals for land use changes, considering both the subject property and adjacent properties. (Imp. 2.1, 14.6, 24.1)

Policy HBB-1.4: Marine Support Uses. Encourage the preservation and enhancement, including new innovations, to existing marine support uses (such as ferry service, fuel docks, and shipyards) serving the needs of existing waterfront uses and the boating community, and encourage the evaluation of impediments to access, such as bridges across City-controlled roads, that may prevent on-land transportation of tall loads. (Imp. 2.1, 14.3, 14.6, 21.1)

Policy HBB-1.5: Private Services. Accommodate private-sector uses, such as vessel assistance and fueling, that provide emergency support, environmental enhancement, and other services that are not provided by the public sector and that are essential to the operation of a working harbor. (Imp. 21.3, 21.4)

Policy HBB-1.6: Property Reuse. Discourage reuse of properties that result in the significant reduction of water-dependent commercial uses. Allow the reuse of properties that ensure water-dependent uses remain, especially in those areas with adequate infrastructure and parcels suitable for redevelopment as an integrated project. (Imp. 2.1, 14.3, 24.1)

Policy HBB-1.7: Use Operations. When establishing land use regulations, consider the operational characteristics of land uses that support Newport Harbor and whether such uses can be or should be relocated to inland locations and/or if technological advances will eliminate the need for such support uses in the foreseeable future. (Imp. 2.1, 14.3, 21.1)

Policy HBB-1.8: Boating. Support continued operation of passenger/sightseeing boats, passenger fishing boats (day boats), and long-term boat rentals and sales. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-1.9: Short-Term Rentals. Support continued short-term rental of boats, wave runners, stand-up paddle boards, and other human-powered watercraft, and require vendors to provide formal training that includes safety briefings. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1, 21.3)

Policy HBB-1.10: Entertainment and Tour Boats. Support continued operation of entertainment and tour boats subject to reasonable regulations designed to ensure that the operations do not have unreasonable adverse impacts on the environment or land uses surrounding the harbor, such as unsafe navigation, impaired water quality, reduced visual quality, excessive noise, unsafe street traffic conditions, or parking shortages. (Imp. 14.3, 21.3)

Goal HBB-2: Minimized risk of displacement by coastal hazards

Policy HBB-2.1 (S-1.1): Sea-Level Rise Plan. Adopt a Sea-Level Rise Plan consistent with Senate Bill 272 (2023) and update the Local Coastal Program, including the Land Use Plan and Implementation Plan, as necessary. Establish and maintain shoreline protection reserves to implement early actions identified in the Sea-Level Rise Plan. The Sea Level Rise Plan should at least consider the following:

- Preservation of private property rights;
- Preservation and migration of inter-tidal habitats;
- Preservation of public access; and
- Protection and retrofit of critical infrastructure, such as water and wastewater infrastructure. (Imp. 5.1, 5.2, 30.1)

Policy HBB-2.2: Emergency Preparedness. Provide information to at-risk property owners about emergency and disaster preparedness and best practices. (Imp. 29.1)

Policy HBB-2.3: Data Collection. Collect king tide and related flood monitoring data to identify location, severity, and frequency of flooding by working with non-profits, educational institutions, and other informed sources, such as (but not limited to) the Newport Bay Conservancy and Back Bay Science Center. (Imp. 10.5)

Goal HBB-3: A harbor, bay, and beaches that attract tourism and maintain the character of coastal neighborhoods

Policy HBB-3.1: Waterfront Public Spaces. Encourage the preservation of public spaces and beaches along the waterfront, to the extent reasonable. Prioritize preservation efforts of public spaces and beaches with adjacent public water access and docking facilities that serve as identity and activity “centers” of Newport Harbor for special events of community/regional interest. (Imp. 20.1, 20.2, 20.3, 21.3)

Policy HBB-3.2: Design and Character. Preserve and/or enhance existing water-enhanced, water-related, and water-dependent commercial uses and marine-oriented commercial areas through building improvements and programs that preserve the design and character of Newport Harbor. (Imp. 2.1, 24.1)

Goal HBB-4: Sufficient coastal infrastructure that protects coastal-dependent and public recreational uses while matching the character of the surrounding development and protecting coastal and visual resources

Policy HBB-4.1: New Bulkhead Siting and Design. Balance private property rights, natural harbor tidal and current forces, other coastal processes (such as erosion and accretion), and harbor aesthetics with other public access policies when considering siting and design for new or renovated bulkhead permits. (Imp. 2.1, 5.1)

Policy HBB-4.2: Beach Profile. Permit and design bulkheads and groins, when allowed, to protect the character of the existing beach profiles and restore and/or sustain eroded beach profiles found around Newport Harbor and island perimeters. (Imp. 2.1, 5.1)

Policy HBB-4.3: Structures Impacting Visual Resources. Limit structures bayward of the bulkhead line to piers, floats, groins, appurtenances related to marine activities, and public walkways. (Imp. 2.1, 5.1)

Policy HBB-4.4: Abandoned Vessels. Employ City, County of Orange, State, and Federal regulations and resources to promptly remove derelict, abandoned, or unseaworthy vessels from City-controlled tidelands. (Imp. 14.3, 14.6, 21.1, 21.4)

Policy HBB-4.5: Launch Ramp Facility. Support the continued use of the launch ramp facility through coordination with the County of Orange, and consider opportunities for the siting and development of a new launch ramp facility owned by the City. (Imp. 14.3, 21.4)

Policy HBB-4.6: Vessel Fueling. Coordinate with fuel dock owners to develop strategies for the long-term preservation of vessel fueling stations. (Imp. 21.4)

Harbor Coordination and Administration

Administration of Newport Harbor and Newport Bay involves coordination among various government agencies and internal City departments. The Harbor Department is responsible for many of the harbor-related programs and services in Newport Beach, providing essential services such as daily harbor patrols, coordinating the use of anchorages and mooring fields, renting available slip space and moorings, and managing the guest marina and Marina Park. The Harbor Department's role is vital for supporting the local marine-dependent economy while also supporting residents, businesses, and visitors through coordinated safety efforts and on-the-water support, and generating revenue for the Harbor Department budget and the Tidelands Fund. The Harbor Department supports both the daily operations and long-term sustainability of Newport Harbor.

Additionally, several commissions and committees handle administrative and advisory tasks, including advising the City Council, reviewing decisions, and managing permits. These are listed below.

Harbor Commission. One of the Harbor Commission's primary charges under Newport Beach City Charter Section 713 is to advise the City Council on all matters related to Newport Harbor, including improvements and vessel regulation.

Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission. Per Newport Beach City Charter Section 709, the Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission advises the City Council on parks, beaches, recreation, and street trees. It helps plan and promote recreational programs, establishes policies for park and beach development, and manages trees and shrubs, subject to City Council authority.

Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee. The Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee advises the City Council on water quality and habitat protection in Newport Bay and the ocean. It strengthens regulations,

implements the Tidelands Infrastructure Capital Plan, and recommends educational initiatives about Newport Bay and the ocean.

California Department of Parks and Recreation. The California Department of Parks and Recreation owns and has delegated to the City the development, operation, control, and maintenance of Corona del Mar State Beach, a popular spot for surfing and diving. The park features a 0.5-mile-long sandy beach enclosed by rocky cliffs.

Goal HBB-5: Coordination among City, County of Orange, State, and Federal agencies having regulatory authority of Newport Harbor and Newport Bay

Policy HBB-5.1: Harbor Standards and Regulations. Periodically review and update, as appropriate, all Newport Harbor planning, design, engineering, and environmental criteria, standards, requirements, and processes. (Imp. 9.1, 21.1, 21.4)

Policy HBB-5.2: Harbor Maintenance Equipment and Facilities. Provide harbor access for harbor maintenance equipment and facilities, including for dredging; dock demolition, repair, and construction; mooring services; debris and spill management equipment; and general harbor construction, maintenance, and repair. (Imp. 14.3, 14.6, 21.1, 21.4)

Policy HBB-5.3: Interagency Cooperation. Work with other applicable controlling agencies within Newport Harbor and/or Newport Bay to define an area that can support harbor maintenance facilities and equipment. (Imp. 14.3, 14.6, 21.1, 21.4)

Policy HBB-5.4: Harbor Patrol. Coordinate with the Orange County Sheriff's Department on patrol of Newport Harbor to provide consistent, effective, and well-coordinated law enforcement on the water. (Imp. 14.3)

Policy HBB-5.5: Coastal Resilience. Ensure that the Water Quality/Coastal Tidelands Committee has adequate representation of experts in coastal resilience to ensure that this topic remains a priority for the City. (Imp. 29.3)

Goal HBB-6: Maintenance and enhancement of deep-water channels to ensure they remain navigable by boats

Policy HBB-6.1: Sediment Management. Develop a comprehensive sediment management program that provides for safe navigation and improved water quality. (Imp. 5.2, 21.2, 30.1)

Policy HBB-6.2: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Coordination. Coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in its maintenance and delineation of Federal navigational channels within Newport Harbor in the interest of providing safe navigation. (Imp. 14.12)

Policy HBB-6.3: Permit Processing. Secure blanket permits or agreements through the regulatory agencies to expedite permit processing for residential and commercial dock owners in Newport Bay. (Imp. 14.6, 14.11)

Policy HBB-6.4: Sediment Management Funding. Develop a sediment management funding plan to identify long-term funding pursuit strategies to support deep-water channels. (Imp. 5.2, 30.1)

Policy HBB-6.5: Streamlined Dredging. Evaluate opportunities to streamline City-led dredging efforts. (Imp. 21.4)

Goal HBB-7: Protection and restoration of beaches and dunes

Policy HBB-7.1 (S-1.4): Nature-Based Solutions. Encourage the use of nature-based solutions for beach and dune preservation and restoration as alternatives to traditional hard infrastructure, to the extent feasible.

Nature-based solutions could include options such as dune restoration and sand replenishment and nourishment. (Imp. 5.2, 8.1, 21.2)

Policy HBB-7.2: Beach Replenishment. Develop and implement a comprehensive sand replenishment program to assist in maintaining beach width and elevations. Analyze monitoring data to determine sand replenishment and nourishment priorities, and try to use sand replenishment and nourishment as shore protection, in lieu of more permanent, hard shoreline armoring options. (Imp. 8.1, 21.2)

Policy HBB-7.3: Beach Erosion Thresholds. Monitor and analyze beach width and elevation data to establish beach erosion thresholds at which backshore development becomes unreasonably exposed to wave runup flooding risks. (Imp. 28.1)

Policy HBB-7.4 (S-1.5): Emergency Use of Coastal Facilities and Equipment. During Emergency Operations Plan updates, reevaluate protocols for the coordinated emergency use of public and private coastal facilities and equipment (i.e., partnerships for allowed use of docks) in advance of flood, storm, pollution, dredging, vessel sinking, and other potentially hazardous events to supplement existing safety and rescue operations. (Imp. 28.2)

Policy HBB-7.5: Shoreline Protection Thresholds. Establish and maintain action thresholds for beach width and elevation that, when exceeded, trigger actions such as defined nourishment, dune management responses, and budget requests. Identify structural armoring enhancements such as groins, jetties, and artificial reefs to advance sand and beach retention while maintaining surfing function. (Imp. 5.2, 30.1)

Economic Value of Newport Harbor, Bay, and Beaches

The City manages an interconnected 47.4-mile-long shoreline system composed of bay and ocean beaches, vital dunes, and the navigational waters of Newport Harbor and the tidal wetlands of Upper Newport Bay⁶. Newport Harbor is among the largest recreational boat harbors on the West Coast, with more than 9,000 recreational boats and a thriving coastal industry that includes maritime-related businesses (e.g., shipyards, fueling facilities, boat rentals, charters, ferry services), food and beverage establishments, retail stores, and hotel industries that service the community and visitors. The beaches serve an estimated 8 million visitors, swimmers, and surfers each year. Beach and boating users are vital to the local economy.

As further detailed in the Harbor and Bay Element Existing Conditions and Background Analysis, Newport Harbor, Bay, and beaches, provides significant economic benefits to both the City and the County of Orange. Based on visitor spending patterns, these areas are estimated to account for slightly more than 30% of all direct tourism-related spending (nearly \$400 million annually) in Newport Beach. This includes spending on accommodations, entertainment, restaurants, retail, and other amenities during their stay, which, for day-trip visitors, is estimated to average slightly less than 4 hours.

Further, based on an analysis of maritime and visitor-serving industries that are in Newport Beach due to the presence of the harbor, bay, and beaches it is estimated that these areas create \$547.4 million in direct economic output annually. This level of economic activity supports approximately 4,440 direct jobs with earnings of \$195.8 million annually. The harbor, bay, and beaches are also estimated to support approximately 5,900 indirect jobs, or 1,500 additional indirect jobs, in Orange County. It is estimated that these areas create \$787 million in total economic output to the County of Orange's economy.

Administration and management of the harbor, bay, and beaches requires coordination among departments, a balance of public investment with revenue, and provision of well-maintained public facilities. Efficient and

⁶ City of Newport Beach. 2026. Demographics and Statistics. <https://www.newportbeachca.gov/i-am-a/visitor/about-newport-beach/demographics-and-statistics>

effective management policies will maintain the City’s ability to provide high-quality services that are accessible to a broad range of people and business.

Goal HBB-8: Well-managed and economically productive harbor, bay, and beaches

Policy HBB-8.1: Marinas and Dry Boat Storage. Protect and, where feasible through the use of new designs and technology, enhance marinas and expand dry boat storage facilities. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.2: Berthing and Mooring. Provide a variety of berthing and mooring opportunities, including lower-cost recreational boating, throughout Newport Harbor, reflecting state and regional demand for various slip sizes and affordability. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.3: Anchorages. Maintain anchorages in designated Federal areas that minimize interference with safe navigation and where shore access and support facilities are available. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.4: Piers. Authorize, pursuant to permit, license, or lease, new and existing piers and docks bayward of waterfront residential properties, subject to appropriate conditions that ensure compatibility with residential uses. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.5: Vacant Moorings. Facilitate access to vacant moorings for temporary rental use. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.6: Mooring Transfers. Foster public access to moorings by enforcing and refining the derelict boat ordinance and regulating permitted transfers by permit holders. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.7: Live-Aboard Vessels. Allow “live-aboard” vessels, subject to a reasonable maximum number of renewable annual permits, and provide for regulation and vessel inspection. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-8.8: Economic Assessment. Conduct regular assessments at least every 5 years of the economic viability of the harbor, bay, and beaches to track potential changes. (Imp. 1.2, 12.2, 21.4)

Goal HBB-9: Cost-efficient servicing and managing of Newport Harbor

Policy HBB-9.1: Tidal Revenue. Explore revenue options to receive a reasonable rate of return from all tideland users to recapture related City investment, services, and management costs. (Imp. 30.2)

Policy HBB-9.2: Supplemental Funding. Provide alternative and supplemental Newport Harbor funding, including seeking Federal and State grants, loans, or partnership agreements, for boater safety, education, maintenance, and capital improvements of Newport Harbor. (Imp. 30.2)

Policy HBB-9.3: Tideland Leases and Permits. Review the administration of tidelands leases and permits; consider accepted best management practices to assist in redevelopment, maintenance, and financing of waterfront developments; and reflect reasonable value in the lease rates. (Imp. 30.2)

Policy HBB-9.4: Cost Recovery. Review costs and procedures to receive reasonable cost recovery for permit processing. (Imp. 21.1)

Policy HBB-9.5: Efficient Harbor Management. Support efficient Newport Harbor management through the use of emerging technologies such as smart buoys, online mooring rentals, vessel tracking, and other technologies, to the extent feasible. (21.2)

Public Access to Coastal Resources

Newport Beach has a well-established system of accessways to ocean beaches and Newport Bay, including public beaches, parks, shoreline trails, walkways, and boardwalks. The City protects public access from adverse impacts due to new development, per the California Coastal Act.

Higher tides and storm surges from sea-level rise can accelerate erosion of sandy beaches, which can often be mitigated through sand nourishment and replenishment. This increased erosion may impact public access to many beach areas, and thus, in extreme cases, to public beach access within Newport Beach. Additionally, unmitigated bluff erosion, which may increase due to sea-level rise, may cause loss and damage to development, including roads, sidewalks, and beach and harbor access points in Corona del Mar and Newport Coast. The possibility of this occurring is greatest in long-term, worst-case sea-level rise scenarios.

Higher sea levels can also lead to increased risk of coastal flooding during consequential storms, which can temporarily impede access to the beach and harbor. Low-lying beach access points may be threatened by significant sea-level rise. The General Plan Safety Element includes maps and additional detail on sea-level rise, potential coastal flooding, and beach erosion.

Access to coastal resources provides recreational, health, and economic benefits. The harbor, bay, and beaches should be valued for the passive and active recreational opportunities they provide, and reasonable access should be provided and maintained for current and future generations. Enhanced reasonable recreational opportunities and user amenities should be available at appropriate locations to enhance the user experience. The types and locations of amenities will consider the needs for both passive and active coastal experiences. As active mobility opportunities are provided, safe pedestrian access should always be prioritized.

Goal HBB-10: Safe and accessible beach and harbor access points

Policy HBB-10.1: Public Access. Provide adequate public access to the shoreline, beach, coastal parks, trails, and Newport Bay; acquire additional public access points and consider new vertical access points to these areas and provide parking, where possible. (Imp. 2.1, 5.1, 20.2)

Policy HBB-10.2: Public Access Facilities. Ensure that new or improved public access facilities are compatible with existing permitted land uses and with the availability of supporting infrastructure, such as parking and restrooms. (Imp. 2.1, 21.1)

Policy HBB-10.3: Access Assessment. Assess beach and harbor access points that are at risk of impacts from coastal hazards, and create long-term management plans to maintain or replace them with similar access. (Imp. 5.2)

Policy HBB-10.4: Facility Accessibility. Maintain and enhance existing infrastructure to support accessibility for a range of users with varied abilities, including enhanced restrooms, parking, bike racks, and other supportive infrastructure. (Imp. 30.1)

Policy HBB-10.5: Marine Safety. Provide for marine safety, such as lifeguards, harbor patrol, on-the-water fire suppression, police, and traffic and parking enforcement through dedicated funds for the Harbor Department and other applicable departments. (Imp. 23.1, 21.4)

Goal HBB-11: Multiple, well-connected coastal access options

Policy HBB-11.1: Provision of Visitor Facilities. Maintain the provision of guest slips, moorings, vessel waste pump-out stations, and anchorages in Newport Harbor. Coordinate with the Orange County Parks Department to provide such facilities where appropriate and feasible within Orange County tidelands. (Imp. 14.3, 21.4)

Policy HBB-11.2: Public Water Transportation. Enhance and maintain public water transportation services and expanded public water transportation uses and land support facilities. (Imp. 16.12)

Policy HBB-11.3: Coastal Transportation. Promote opportunities to expand water transportation modes, such as water-based shuttle services and water taxis, and land-based transportation modes aimed at increasing coastal access, such as the Balboa Peninsula Trolley. (Imp. 16.12)

Policy HBB-11.4: Navigation Tools. Improve accessibility to coastal areas and represent neighborhood character through the use of navigation tools such as physical wayfinding signage, real-time maps, QR codes, and other applicable methods. (Imp. 21.6)

Policy HBB-11.5: Wayfinding. Assess potential improvements to wayfinding in coastal areas highlighting visitor resources. (Imp. 21.6, 16.13)

Upper Newport Bay

Upper Newport Bay, nestled in the heart of Newport Beach, is one of the largest remaining wetlands in the region, spanning approximately 700 acres.⁷ This area provides sanctuary to a diverse array of fish, birds, reptiles, plants, and other species. Also known as the Back Bay, this estuarine ecosystem is a popular destination for migratory birds, offering numerous birdwatching opportunities. The Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area, covering just over 1 square mile, includes lagoons, tidal flats, and coastal marsh habitats. It protects a variety of small mammals, fish, birds, crustaceans, and other creatures, including some endangered species, and provides residents and visitors opportunities for recreation. This area is vitally important as a rest stop for migratory birds, with up to 30,000 birds visible in a single day during winter migration periods⁸.

Management of this ecological reserve balances conservation with public access, governed by policies that protect sensitive habitats while promoting educational and recreational opportunities. Public access considerations include trails, walkways, and educational facilities that allow visitors to experience this ecological treasure while minimizing environmental impacts. Upper Newport Bay exemplifies the delicate balance between preserving critical habitat and providing meaningful public access to natural coastal resources.

Goal HBB-12: Protection of the visual and ecological resources of Upper Newport Bay

Policy HBB-12.1: Public Access. Maintain public use in Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve and Ecological Reserve to the extent that such use is consistent with the preservation of sensitive resources. (Imp. 2.1, 23.1)

Policy HBB-12.2 (NR-11.1): Interagency Coordination. Continue interagency coordination with relevant entities involved in the protection and preservation of Upper Newport Bay. (Imp. 14.3, 14.6, 14.7, 14.8, 14.13, 14.14, 14.15)

Policy HBB-12.3 (NR-12.1, S-6.1): Stormwater Drainage. Preserve, where possible, natural watercourses or provide naturalized drainage channels within Newport Beach. Where feasible, implement restoration and rehabilitation opportunities. (Imp. 1.1, 5.2, 7.5)

Policy HBB-12.4 (NR-12.2, S-6.2): Stormwater Management Coordination. Continue to coordinate the needs of stormwater pollution management with the overlapping (and sometimes competing) needs for habitat management, flood management, capital improvement projects, development, aesthetics, and open space needs. (Imp. 14.15, 19.1)

Policy HBB-12.5: Supplemental Funding. Provide alternative and supplemental Upper Newport Bay funding, including seeking Federal and State grants, loans, or partnership agreements for boater safety, education, maintenance, and capital improvements of the estuary and conservation areas. (Imp. 17.2, 23.7, 29.1, 29.3)

Policy HBB-12.6: Visual Resources Maintenance. Protect and manage visual and scenic resources by maintaining scenic resource inventories, protection plans, regulations, and other tools. (Imp. 5.2, 10.1)

⁷ Newport Bay Conservancy. 2024. "Bay Management." <https://newportbay.org/the-bay/bay-management/>.

⁸ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2026. "Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area." <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Upper-Newport-Bay>.

Policy HBB-12.7: New Visual Resources. Encourage new public and private development to create new public viewpoints that provide views of Upper Newport Bay. (Imp. 2.1, 5.2)

Policy HBB-12.8: Reduce Pollution. Minimize pollution in Upper Newport Bay through support of actions and infrastructure that reduce trash, such as the Newport Bay Trash Interceptor. (Imp. 10.3, 16.15)

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