

Research

Wetlands building gets boost

Marina in Bolsa Chica is feasible, report says

By Rod Speer
Register staff writer

Plans by Signal Landmark Inc. to build a marina and waterfront homes in the Bolsa Chica lowlands near Huntington Beach have been given a boost by a favorable U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report.

The corps, in an interim report released this month, said it is possible, from an engineering and economic standpoint, to build an ocean entrance to Bolsa Bay as well as a marina and restored salt marsh.

The report also said a new marina — strongly opposed by environmental groups — would help meet the intense demand for boat docks in Southern California.

But the conclusion of the Corps of Engineers study, authorized by Congress in 1964, is that more studies are needed to determine whether a major ocean channel can be cut through Bolsa Chica State Beach — nearly \$500,000 worth of studies.

Darlene Frost, Signal's manager for the Bolsa Chica project, said "We're encouraged by this progress report."

Signal, the major landowner within the 1,600-acre property, hopes to build a 1,800-slip public marina and 5,700 homes within Bolsa Chica, a deteriorated salt marsh. Signal also would be expected to help finance the expansion of a 150-acre state marsh land preserve to at least 600 acres.

Most of the land not in the preserve is being used for oil production.

The Corps of Engineers report represents a victory for Orange County, which has backed development of the marina and waterside homes.

"The merits of the project have been reconfirmed by this analysis, and we're encouraged that we should push ahead," said Robert Fisher, county planning director.

Supervisor Harriett Wieder, whose district includes Bolsa Chica, said, "The report proves what we have been saying all along, (that) an ocean entrance is a sensible approach." She said a channel would provide tidal flushing for an expanded salt marsh, as well as a new route to the sea for boaters.

Fisher said the feasibility of digging an ocean entrance at Bolsa Bay has been a major concern to
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the California Coastal Commission, which has final say on the plan's approval.

The coastal commission's staff has opposed development of the lowlands, largely in hope that most or all of the land can be restored as a natural marsh land habitat for wildlife.

In November, facing almost certain rejection from the commission, the county withdrew its local coastal plan for Bolsa Chica. The commission is expected to look more favorably upon development since Republican Gov. George

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Deukmejian took office in January.

A marsh land preservation group, the Amigos de Bolsa Chica, has vigorously opposed the marina and home-building proposal.

Fisher and Frost said it will be important for the Corps of Engi-

neers to continue with the report.

Fisher said it is not crucial that the corps immediately complete the report, which corps officials estimate will take 21 months. But he said more details on the design features of the proposed ocean entrance, marina and marsh will be needed before the county can re-

submit the development plan to the coastal commission. Fisher said he hopes that can be done by late summer.

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The county and state Department of Fish and Game are trying to work out a way to get the study completed, Fisher said. Signal will be asked to reimburse the county, but the county is trying to limit the

scope of further studies to reduce the total cost, he said.

In its review, the corps looked at the possibility of building an 850-foot-wide, 20-foot-deep, navigable ocean entrance for boaters and a 350-foot-wide, 5-foot-deep, non-navigable channel that would provide tidal flushing for a larger salt marsh. The report concluded that both could be built without adverse effects on the beaches, tides or Pacific Coast Highway.

The corps of engineers study said three or four 1,000-foot-long rock jetties would likely have to be

built on the beach northwest of any ocean channel entrance in order to prevent beach erosion. Otherwise, dredges or pumps would have to be used to compensate for sand drift down the coast, the report said.

The study conceded that more information is needed on the extent of the wetlands habitat and on the effect the proposed development will have on water quality.

The corps estimated the cost of restoring about 1,200 acres of lowlands at \$91 million, a cost Supervisor Wieder said was "prohibitive and unrealistic."

BOLSA CHICA
(City)
PAMPHLET