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UC Santa Barbara moves toward restoration of Ellwood Marine Terminal

Shelly Leachman
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With a goal of restoring the site for the benefit of the public, UC Santa Barbara has received approval from the California Coastal Commission to initiate the demolition of the Ellwood Marine Terminal (EMT) tanks, pipes and facilities. The project follows the UCSB Cheadle Center's restoration of North Campus Open Space, and its long-term management and ongoing restoration of Coal Oil Point Reserve.

With grant funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board, State Coastal Conservancy and former property tenants — and with leadership by UC Santa Barbara — the EMT project will include removal of the facilities and screening trees to provide for nearly 360-degree views. Views will extend from open ocean and the surf at Sands Beach through the dunes, Devereux Slough and the Santa Ynez mountains. The restoration vision includes protecting existing wetlands and restoring the historic high point that was leveled when the tanks were installed in 1929. Habitats to be restored include native perennial bunchgrass, seasonal and perennial wetlands, coastal sage scrub, mixed oak woodland, coastal dunes and riparian scrub.

Beginning in March, UC Santa Barbara will facilitate a public engagement process to help delineate the public access trails, overlooks and interpretation that will be guided by perspectives from the Chumash community, neighbors, birders, students and other interested users. Public participation is welcome; anyone interested should email ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu for more information.

The demolition and remediation are anticipated to take at least 8 months. The restoration work will begin in parallel in areas surrounding the facility, and continue for up to five years of active restoration. Public access engagement will extend through this spring in conjunction with the landscape architecture design process. Public access features such as trails, overlooks and signage will require additional funding and may be installed in 2026.

The proposed project seeks to remediate the impacts of the EMT tanks and to fulfill the vision of a restored coastal terrace at Ellwood-Devereux for generations of Californians.

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draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.