



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 10, 2025

Black Surf Santa Cruz Secures Historic Nonprofit Permitting Exemption in City's Beach Management Plan

Santa Cruz, CA – In a major victory for equitable coastal access, the California Coastal Commission (CCC) unanimously approved an addendum to the City of Santa Cruz's Beach Management Plan (BMP) on March 12, 2025. This amendment includes a nonprofit and tribal permitting exemption, ensuring organizations like Black Surf Santa Cruz (BSSC) can operate our Pop-Up Program (PUP) on city beaches without unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

This groundbreaking change represents a major step toward institutionalizing equity in coastal policy and sets a precedent that other California coastal cities may follow.

Before this amendment, access to surf instruction at Cowell Beach for nonprofits was left to the discretion of the City's Director of Parks and Recreation and was not *formally* codified in any policy, law, or plan. This left organizations like BSSC vulnerable to arbitrary decisions and inconsistent access. The approved BMP now formally exempts nonprofit entities from the City's restrictive surf permitting processes, aligning with the California Coastal Act's mandate for equitable public access to coastal resources.

Additional BMP Accessibility Measures Include:

- Installation of ADA-accessible beach mats for individuals with limited mobility
- Introduction of a new beach concessionaire to enhance recreation while reducing single-use plastic waste
- Codification of the City's commitment to inclusion and equitable access

Historically, surf permit ordinances in Santa Cruz and surrounding regions have imposed strict limitations on the number of permitted surf schools and student capacities. These rules often marginalized newer, BIPOC-led, and nonprofit organizations, making it harder for them to offer inclusive and accessible ocean experiences.

In response, BSSC made history by becoming the first organization to secure a County of Santa Cruz -issued nonprofit surf school permit—a groundbreaking achievement that helped pave the way for the City's exemption.

These milestones culminate with relentless advocacy by BSSC and other fearless advocates across the coast, such as organizations within the Surf Justice Collective, a diverse network of surf and ocean-centered nonprofits throughout California. Founder and Executive Director Esabella Bonner has



persistently worked alongside these leaders to challenge local restrictive permitting processes that disproportionately impact BIPOC-led organizations. By engaging city and county officials, leveraging the California Coastal Act, and learning from parallel coastal access efforts in [Pacifica](#) by groups like Salted Roots (formerly Brown Girl Surf) and City Surf Project, BSSC has helped craft scalable models for equity-focused coastal access.

“This is a victory, not just for Black Surf Santa Cruz, but for every community-based nonprofit working to make the ocean more accessible,” said Bonner. “We’ve seen firsthand how unnecessary red tape can be used to exclude us. Now, Santa Cruz is leading the way in ensuring equitable access for all.”

For more information, see the California Coastal Commission agenda (Consent Item 15D):

<https://www.coastal.ca.gov/meetings/agenda/#/2025/3>

City of Santa Cruz announcement:

<https://www.cityofsantacruz.com/Home/Components/News/News/10751>

About Black Surf Santa Cruz

Founded in 2020, **Black Surf Santa Cruz** is dedicated to creating safe, inclusive ocean experiences for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Black Surf Santa Cruz aims to "promote physical, spiritual, and communal healing through surfing, recreation, education, and wellness." The organization centers Black community members and other historically and presently excluded people of color in its programming. Through programs like the **Liberation Paddle Out**, **Prepare to Pop-Up**, and **Pop-Up Program**, BSSC provides free access to equipment, surf instruction, and community support, ensuring the ocean is a healing space and joy for all.

To learn more, visit: blacksurfsantacruz.org.

Find us on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn: @blacksurfsantacruz



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Pop-Up Program 2025. PC: JJ Harris (techboogie).



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Pop- Up Program 2023. PC: Kaili Reynolds.