



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: September 26, 2012

TO: Park and Recreation Commission

FROM: Recreation Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Shark Sightings and Shark Attacks on Marine Mammals

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receive a report on the increase of confirmed shark sightings and shark attacks on marine mammals on or near City beaches.

DISCUSSION:

At the conclusion of the summer 2012 season, a total of nine confirmed shark sightings and ten attacks on marine mammals had occurred throughout Santa Barbara County. Of the 19 combined shark incidents, seven occurred within the City of Santa Barbara limits. This sudden increase in shark sightings and marine mammal attacks resulted in staff from the Waterfront and Parks and Recreation Departments collaboratively working to create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for future credible shark sightings, attacks, and other aggressive marine mammal behavior. The current draft SOP requires a 72-hour advisory posting for any credible shark incident within the City limits, or a 24- hour beach closure for a situation that presents an imminent threat to the public.

In addition to the City's draft SOP, which includes protocols for public notification and beach postings, the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management recently hosted a meeting to discuss the increased frequency of shark incidents this summer. The meeting included shark experts and public safety personnel from agencies within Santa Barbara County. The purpose of this meeting was to educate attendees about shark behavior and the recent increase in shark activity, and to formulate plans for the different agencies to communicate and advise the public when credible shark sightings, attacks, or aggressive marine mammal behavior occur.

As an outcome of the meeting, staff determined that every shark incident is its own unique episode and a single inter-agency standardized SOP will not meet everyone's specific needs. That said, Parks and Recreation and Waterfront staff will continue to notify the public when informed of credible accounts of shark sightings and shark attacks on marine mammals that they believe warrant such notice.

As noted above, however, the meeting also highlighted the need for the respective agencies to improve communication among themselves, to ensure each agency is aware of all shark incidents reported locally. The establishment of a County-wide notification list for lifeguards and public safety personnel is being developed to ensure each agency is contacted promptly after a shark "incident," to allow sufficient time to make informed decisions, and when necessary, implement their respective notification procedures.

The safety of city beaches and ocean users continues to remain the top priority during any shark incident, and the current SOP prioritizes public safety over all other considerations.

When the final SOP is complete, it will continue to prioritize public safety while providing clear guidance for designated staff in defining the parameters for how an advisory or beach closure is determined and how information is distributed among other public-safety agencies in the County.

SUBMITTED BY: Rich Hanna, Senior Recreation Supervisor

APPROVED BY: Nancy L. Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director