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## Peninsula Trees Mistakenly Trimmed, Heron Dies

By Harry Saltzgaver  
Executive Editor  
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The median trees along Ocean Boulevard on the Peninsula after being trimmed last week.

—Gazette photo by Howard Freshman

Tree trimming crews came to the Peninsula on Wednesday, May 6, and began working in the palms along Ocean Boulevard — a clear violation of Long Beach's coastal permit.

"We're still uncovering details, but it was clearly a mistake," Public Works director Craig Beck said Thursday afternoon. "West Coast Arborists were trimming the tall palms around 65th Place, and a neighbor called and said there was a bird on the ground. We responded and told West Coast to leave."

Great Blue Herons and Night Herons are known to nest in the trees.

Long Beach has an agreement with the state Coastal Commission to not trim trees in nesting season — which stretches from Feb. 15 to Sept. 1. Beck said there are some exceptions, but it's a rule that no trees with nests be disturbed.

Peninsula resident Margaret Smith said that a number of people came out to the street Wednesday to try to stop the tree trimming.

"When residents saw what was happening, they warned the company and tried to get them to stop destroying the nests and killing the chicks," Smith said in an email. "Their protests were ignored by the workers until a city official came out and stopped the work."

Beck said it was unlikely that West Coast Arborists would trim trees without a work order from the city. The Public Works Department handles tree maintenance. The city last extended that contract in February for another year.

"I've asked West Coast for a full report," Beck said. "When they trim, they're supposed to look for birds' nests... If we gave them a work order to be out there, that's not in line with our coastal permit.

"It's likely a work order was issued. We'll do an investigation and find out where the mistake occurred. Then we'll deal with it internally."

Anna Christensen, a longtime environmental advocate in the area, wrote that she had filed a complaint with the state Coastal Commission — the commission's monthly meeting is Wednesday and Thursday, May 13 and 14. She wrote as the Conservation Chair, Long Beach Area Group, Sierra Club.

"As residents pleaded for them to stop, the WCA crew using chain saws destroyed active nests and killed fledglings," Christensen wrote. "Great Blue Herons nesting on the Peninsula (@ 13 active nests) could be seen and heard flying above the now decimated parkway palms...

"The Long Beach City Council must act to prohibit the trimming of street trees, other than for public safety reasons, during nesting season and also consider additional measures for ensuring that nesting sites, active nests and young are not harmed by city staff, contractors, or residents."

Beck said he was aware of one bird death. In social media posts, some people said several fledglings were killed, but that could not be confirmed.

"Obviously, this is a very unfortunate thing to happen," Beck said. "We're consulting a biologist, and we'll do what we need to do. We will be submitting a report to the Coastal Commission and the state Fish and Game (the Department of Fish and Wildlife)."

Noaki Schwartz, a public information officer for the state Coastal Commission, said, "Our enforcement unit is actively investigating this but can't share any details this early in the investigation. Our staff has contacted the city and confirmed that all work has stopped while we carry out our investigation."

Beck and city officials spent much of last year battling with environmental advocates over palm trees on Marina Drive. The city did a "Complete Streets" makeover of Marina Drive between Second Street and Studebaker Road to accommodate the new 2ND & PCH center. That project added sidewalks and bike lanes, and reduced traffic to one lane in each direction.

But the work required moving or removing multiple palm trees, prompting appeals to local, then state agencies. The issue was compounded by the removal of palm trees on the development site. Ultimately, permits were approved after a number of modifications, the removed trees were replaced and more trees were added.

No birds were reported injured or killed at that project, and a nest in one palm tree was roped off and no work done near it until the birds had left the nest.

To listen to and/or participate in the Coastal Commission meeting, go to [documents.coastal.ca.gov/assets/virtual-hearing/VIRTUAL-HEARING-PROCEDURES.pdf](https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/assets/virtual-hearing/VIRTUAL-HEARING-PROCEDURES.pdf).

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## Harry Saltzgaver

Harry has been executive editor of Gazette Newspapers for more than 26 years. He has been in the newspaper business for more than 35 years, with experience on both weekly and metropolitan daily papers in Colorado and California.