

# The Environmental Case for Creating a 2nd Opening to San Diego Bay

By George Mullen



Naval Base San Diego is seen through the Coronado Bay Bridge. Photo by Chris Stone

China's recent hypersonic missile test and Russia's missile destruction of an orbiting satellite should be alarming to all Americans, especially those in San Diego.

Why especially San Diego? Because San Diego is home to one of the largest U.S. Naval bases, and arguably the most important one for confronting threats from China, Russia and North Korea.

In turn, San Diego is a high priority target for these aggressors. Furthermore, San Diego Bay has only one exit which makes it highly vulnerable to an attack to entrap the naval armada ported here.

America's new \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill presents us with a golden opportunity to finally build the long-talked about second opening to San Diego Bay as both a backdoor escape and an environmental rebirth.

The ideal location for this new opening is in South Bay — specifically through Navy land in Emory Cove, just south of the Coronado Cays. This is the narrow (and unused) part of the Silver Strand between the Cays and the Navy's new Silver Strand Training Complex. Likewise, there are two viable locations north of the Cays.

In Times of San Diego, I recently presented the [case for this second opening](#) from the viewpoint of America's national security. In this column I make the second half of this case — from the critically important environmental infrastructure perspective.

The environmental benefits of such an opening are significant and, until now, have been largely ignored. This project could be the next great environmental step forward for South Bay and the entire San Diego region.



Ideal location for second opening to San Diego Bay.

There are eight key points to consider.

First, having two openings (at opposite ends of the bay) will be beneficial for cleansing the bay with daily tidal flushings into the open ocean. Currently, South Bay seawater has no escape, it just sloshes back and forth from mid-bay with the tides, like a dirty bathtub. Would any of us want our bathtub to always contain the same dirty water?

Confirming this assessment, the Los Angeles Times reported in 1987, *“The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers launched an intensive study of the channel project, even building a huge, 2,500-square-foot model of the bay to test out the consequences of changing tidal currents by opening up the South Bay to the ocean.”*

*“The verdict: the second entrance would improve the tidal flushing action of the bay without eroding the deep-water channels used by commercial and military ships.”*

Second, a new bay opening will necessitate the construction of breakwaters into the Pacific Ocean for the safe passage of entering and exiting ships. This presents a unique opportunity to incorporate a game changing renewable wave-energy plant within the breakwaters as proven by Spain’s innovative [Mutriku Wave Energy Plant](#).

The large size of these proposed breakwaters should enable us to generate a significant multiple of Mutriku’s electricity output. Such a renewable green-energy project will likely become a global design model for helping to avert climate change.

Third, South Bay was environmentally mistreated for over a century, and, even after all the incredible environmental work in recent years, still has extensive debris and toxins under the bay topsoil. This project presents us with the opportunity to simultaneously seek major additional mitigation to further cleanse contaminated dirt and sands,

remove underwater rubble and unnecessary jetties, and preserve wetlands that are key to carbon sequestration to avert climate change. Likewise, the nearby National Wildlife Refuge with migrating birds, sea turtles, fish, eel grass and such will be maintained and improved.

Fourth, we live in a highly integrated bi-national region with Tijuana, and this is an opportunity to link this new bay opening with the bi-national plan to resolve the sewage issues plaguing the adjacent Tijuana River Valley and Pacific Ocean. Proximity (and importance) suggests that these issues be linked and pursued simultaneously.

Fifth, significantly less fuel will be used (and fewer pollutants and carbon emitted) by Navy ships, thus helping our cities and county reach their Climate Action Plan goals. This is because most of our Navy ships are ported in South Bay — and when they go on maneuvers they must traverse the entire length of our bay just to reach the open ocean.

With a new South Bay exit, their commutes will be cut into less than half. As we think about the thousands of times these massive Navy ships (and their escorts and tug boats) go up and down our bay, we realize how big of a deal this could be in bettering our air and bay-water quality.

Sixth, timing is everything and President Biden just signed the infrastructure bill. This bay opening is the exact type of port infrastructure project that should be at the top of the priority list. It's a \$1 billion project, which amounts to less than a tenth of 1% of this bill — an incredible bang for its buck.

Seventh, it would be far better to accomplish this project working together, hand-in-hand, with environmentally-focused groups. If we don't do so, then some day — perhaps sooner than any of us think — an international crisis could prompt the Navy to rapidly (and recklessly) blast out a second bay opening to protect its \$100 billion to

\$200 billion investment in Navy ships. Such a rushed approach would likely be an environmental catastrophe.

Eighth, from an aggressor nation's viewpoint, San Diego's single bay opening (and vulnerable Coronado Bay Bridge) is a highly tempting target in order to bottle up the Navy's Pacific Fleet, while they seek to achieve nefarious objectives elsewhere. This is eerily reminiscent of what compelled Imperial Japan to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941.

By creating a fully operational second bay opening, we will largely eliminate this temptation. Likewise, doing so will avert the environmental damage of such an attack. We certainly don't want San Diego to become a repeat of Pearl Harbor or New York City on Sept. 11, events which created environmental disaster zones for years.

The vast environmental benefits speak loudly, making this project a win-win for all concerned. Perhaps it is time for a serious community conversation about completing this critically important (and long-overdue) second opening to San Diego Bay.

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Link to Times of San Diego article:

<https://timesofsandiego.com/opinion/2021/11/27/the-environmental-case-for-creating-a-2nd-opening-to-san-diego-bay/>