

Writing (45 minutes)

Instructions: You have 45 minutes to read the article below and answer the prompt in an essay. Use your own words. Do not copy. You will be scored based on writing, reading and grammar skills. Expected approximate length 1 ½ pages or 300 words.

Should beaches be private or public? Changing ownership of beachfront property has led to a renewed debate on public and private ownership of land. In your own words, summarize two sides of the debate below. Then, give your own opinion.

Who Owns the Beach?

From Los Angeles to Beirut, beachfront property has been undergoing privatization for years. As private individuals buy land that was once owned by the government and open to the public, many have begun to question whether beaches should be privately or publicly owned. In California, Martin's Beach, a popular surfing beach, was just bought by a private buyer, sparking public outrage. This beach was once open to all due to a "public trust doctrine," but now is closed. This "public trust doctrine," a rule that oceanfront property and the beach in front of it remain open to the public, varies by state. As Californians decide whether beaches should be private or public, many experts have voiced their opinions.

Environmental activists have argued in favor of keeping beaches publicly owned. In support of a "public trust doctrine," A. W. Kahrl, a professor at the University of Virginia, argues that keeping beaches public will help ensure environmental protection and sustainability. He argues, "Protecting universal access to the nation's seashores is one of the best defense mechanisms we have against reckless overdevelopment." If the land is not protected, private owners will build without consideration of environmental protection. Additionally, if the public owns and uses the land, they have an incentive to protect it. He notes, "Beaches are our common inheritance and if we don't want to lose them, their protection must be our collective responsibility."

Others have also weighed in on the debate. Health activists have pointed out that beaches are one place left where families and friends can gather and get much needed outdoor exercise. Public beaches offer this public good at little to no cost. Without these public spaces, many families are left with no safe area for physical exercise. Coastwalk California highlights that the public has invested in these spaces for this purpose and expects a return on their investment.

However, critics of keeping beaches public argue the best way to protect beaches is through private ownership. Reed Watson of the Property and Environment Research Center points out, "People tend to take care of the things they own and neglect the things they don't. That's why no rational person in the history of the world ever changed the oil in a rental car." As no individual owns the beach, no one has the incentive to take care of it. Publicly owned beaches suffer as anyone can visit as much as they want, leaving little preserved. Individual owners who have an interest in maintaining their property, on the other hand, preserve privately owned beaches as much as possible. This is why Kholsa, a private buyer and well-known environmental activist, decided to buy Martin's Beach rather than support the public beach that was already there. Privately, he can ensure the protection of the beach.

Privatization may also be the best way to ensure the best experience for beachgoers. Free public beaches lead to long lines and crowded sands. Recreation expert Todd Williams asks, "Who wants to go to a beach with standing room only?" The quality of the beach visitor's experience declines as the number of visitors increases. For this reason, some argue the most effective way to ensure the best experience for beachgoers is privatization rather than keeping beaches public and open to all.

As the debate on the privatization of beaches continues, much remains to be decided. Policymakers are left to decide where public space ends and private space begins and to weigh environmental and economic concerns. More fundamentally, though, policymakers are left to decide the role of the government in providing goods and services.

Reading Comprehension (15 minutes)

Instructions: You have fifteen minutes to answer the questions below, which are based on the article “Who Owns the Beach?” Circle the best answer for questions 1-7. In one to two sentences, write the best answer for questions 8-10.

1. What is the main idea of this passage?
 - a. Privatization is the best way to protect beaches.
 - b. Privatization of beaches is now under debate.
 - c. Keeping beaches public is the best way to protect beaches.
 - d. Keeping beaches public is better for the environment.
2. Which of the following might be the best alternative title for this reading?
 - a. The Privatization of Beaches
 - b. Who Owns Our Land?
 - c. Buying Beaches in Los Angeles
 - d. Losing California’s Beaches
3. What is the author’s point of view in this article?
 - a. Beaches should be privately owned.
 - b. Beaches should be publicly owned.
 - c. There should be a mix of private and public ownership for beaches.
 - d. The author does not take a side on the issue.
4. In this article, *privatization* probably means selling something to the government.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. In this article, what does *incentive* probably mean?
 - a. Reason
 - b. Method
 - c. Ability
 - d. Idea
6. According to the article, what’s the best way to protect against overdevelopment on beaches?
 - a. Privatization of beaches
 - b. Public ownership of beaches
7. According to the article, what is the basic decision policymakers have to make?
 - a. Whether environmental concerns are important
 - b. Whether economic concerns are important
 - c. Whether the government should provide public goods
 - d. Whether there should be a “public trust doctrine”
8. In paragraph one, *doctrine* is closest in meaning to _____?
9. In paragraph 4, the example of the rental car supports what argument?
10. According to the article, why did Kholsa buy Martin’s Beach?