

Comments to the Planning Commission January 2018
Re: Short Term Rentals (STR) in Big Sur

My name is Tim Green. I raised my family and spent my working life in Big Sur. I represent the Big Sur Local Coastal Program Defense Committee.

Recently, on the Monterey County website, a statement by the Monterey County Vacation Rental Alliance advocating STRs in Big Sur was posted. It said, "the Big Sur planning area is no different from any other rural area of Monterey County."

In the 1960's Highway one through Big Sur was named a national scenic highway, two years later it was named the first California scenic highway. In the 70's the California Coastal Commission identified and funded Big Sur as a special study area to assure its protection under the Coastal Act. In the 1980's there were three pieces of national legislation that attempted to make the Big Sur coast first a national park, then a national seashore and finally a national scenic corridor. They nearly succeeded. Today it's California's favorite drive and draws people from all over the world. Six million people a year come through Big Sur. In California only Yosemite National Park rivals it's popularity.

Such popularity invites development. The sole means of preserving Big Sur's pastoral character, it's near wilderness beauty and public access to see it has been the Big Sur Local Coastal Plan.

The Big Sur local coastal plan was unanimously certified by the California Coastal Commission in 1986 and was designed to address the two primary goals of the California coastal act (1974): resource protection and optimum public access. Big Sur is a seventy mile, narrow strip of rugged coast, accessible only by a substandard two lane road, highway one. In recent years this highway has been overcapacity leading to serious traffic congestion many months of the year, reducing public access and the quality of visitor experience. Early in the planing process (1979) the very limited capacity of highway one through Big Sur was recognized as a primary constraint to the development of the coast. It was determined that to optimize public access while protecting the scenic resources, the highway's primary historic use as a scenic travel corridor should be protected as the primary public resource of the Big Sur coast. The Big Sur coast, as defined by the BSLCP, is primarily a scenic travel corridor. All other uses (residential, commercial and public - destination uses) should be limited to preserve two thirds of the highway capacity for scenic travel. Destination uses significantly increase internal traffic congestion reducing highway capacity and, thereby, public access.

The land use plan for Big Sur resulted in a massive residential downzoning. From 10,000 parcels to less than 1,000. The remaining 600 to 700 buildable residential parcels were set aside (no conversions) in order to preserve the small residential community. The plan recognizes the Big Sur community as a valuable public resource:

for its culture, its preservation ethic and its contribution to hospitality work force housing. Big Sur has been in a serious housing deficit for many years. There are zero affordable rental vacancies in Big Sur. Many service workers sleep in their car or camp. Very little additional housing is possible as residential buildout is essentially complete. STRs take housing, depleting our very small community and adding hundreds of commuters to an already overburdened highway.

The LUP also imposes limits on commercial Transient Occupancy (T.O.) development in order to preserve highway capacity for the travel corridor. A limit of 300 additional lodging units (as of 1986) is allowed by the plan. A recent rough count of the lodging units in Big Sur indicates there is little to no allowance left for additional lodging units. STRs are a transient occupancy use, generating traffic and service needs similar to other lodging accommodations and therefore must be considered under the cap for lodging units.

Big Sur is different.

It's a 70 mile scenic corridor of extreme popularity but very limited highway capacity. For that reason, all development in Big Sur has been radically limited. STRs in Big Sur are inconsistent with its land use plan, having negative impacts on policies established to preserve its small community, its limited housing and public access to its primary resource: the scenic beauty of a still wild coast.

Big Sur and highway one are being overwhelmed with visitation. It is time that the county and the STR industry recognize that STRs are not consistent with the plan which was carefully studied and crafted, over nine years, to protect a national treasure and public access to see it.