

In Order to Save It, They Will Destroy It

Comments on The Big Sur Sustainable Tourism Destination Stewardship Plan (DSP)

My thoughts (July 4, 2020) :

The County of Monterey, The Visitors Bureau and the Community Association of Big Sur (CABS) have supported the development of The Destination Stewardship Plan (DSP), a draft management plan to address the recent congestion and overcrowding along the Big Sur Coast.

It is my impression that this document is largely the product of Beyond Green Travel (BGT) with agency input, particularly the Coastal Commission. I was impressed by the BGT's investigation but the bulk of the management solutions left me cold. These planners paid only lip service to the Big Sur LUP that has protected this coast for decades. From the Big Sur LUP:

- "The Scenic beauty of the Big Sur Coast, and the opportunity to escape urban patterns are prime attractions for residents and visitors alike."
- "Man made improvements detract from the near wilderness attributes (of the coast) if not individually, then collectively."
- "...all developments must harmonize with and be subordinate to the wild and natural character of the land."

In the 1960's, highway one through Big Sur was named both a state and a federal scenic highway and was more recently designated an All American Road, defined as a place of such beauty that the highway has become a destination unto itself. People come to see this 70 miles of unchanged, natural beauty.

The solutions offered by the DSP to Big Sur's overcrowding are new attractions which will bring more people and cars and will alter forever the experience of this wild coast.

The proposed Bixby Trail Loop and Overlook will move the car and pedestrian congestion to the south side of Bixby. The Pfeiffer Shuttle will attract more people and where will the parking lot be? A North Shuttle and a South Shuttle (what have been the results of the shuttles at Yosemite? more problems)

Also, a local shuttle for visitors and guests who don't want to weather the crowded highway (a new tour, more people, another parking lot). This plan would create our own Big Sur transit system: signs, shuttle stops, groups of waiting riders here and there, shuttles zipping by regularly clad in sustainability advertising.

Does this feel urban yet? Does this feel like the LUP's goal "all development must harmonize..."? There's more.

A visitor center ("educational and interesting") will attract still more people.

Where will we put this building and its parking lot? The only place that has been discussed in recent years is the Naval Base. A more significant blot (scar) on the critical viewshed is hard to imagine.

In my opinion these are not solutions to Big Sur's congestion; they are invitations to greater congestion and overuse of the area and the gradual dismemberment of the Big Sur Land Use Plan (amendment after amendment). A plan that is broadly recognized as the gold standard of all such plans.

In recent years, on peak use days, the Big Sur coast attracts more than 10,000 cars a day exceeding the carrying capacity of highway one. The resulting congestion reduces public access and the quality of visitor's experience. We do not need more attractions.

The DSP promotes the development of Big Sur with total disregard for the fundamental goals of its Land Use Plan: preserve the unmarred and wild beauty of the coast for all to see.

We must solve Big Sur's traffic and overcrowding problems without destroying its treasured beauty. The highway has points of congestion that need to be addressed: by reservation only or closure.

Without adding eyesores and management nightmares to the wild coast, any additional bathrooms need to be contained in the existing four commercial zones, the state parks or the forrest stations.

A critical issue is the need to regulate traffic entering Big Sur. Transportation studies and the Land Use Plan itself recognize that eventually Big Sur's popularity will overwhelm the limited carrying capacity of highway one.

We have arrived at that point. In order to maintain high accessibility and the quality of the visitor's experience the traffic entering Big Sur needs to be regulated.

Politically, this is not easy. However, it may be the only solution if the inspiring wild beauty of the coast is to remain a national treasure for all to see.

For more updates on the DSP and other issues concerning Big Sur please sign up for email updates from the Big Sur Defense Committee at bigsurclp.com.

Is this the future of the wild beauty?

Tim Green

Addendum to DSP comments (July 23, 2020)

The final draft of the DSP should be released by the end of July - the CABS website will inform you.

The DSP may not be the blueprint for Big Sur's future. But make no mistake, it will help open the doors to massive changes to the coast and to the Land Use Plan which has protected it. The DSP makes no bones about breaking the Critical Viewshed, minimum development and scenic travel priorities of Big Sur's plan. The DSP, taken together with the County's proposed STR ordinance for Big Sur and its advocacy for radically negating Big Sur's Critical Viewshed policy lead to a clear and troubling picture. In the name of public access, the County and Coastal Commission want to "open up" Big Sur to more development. The pristine beauty that millions come to see and the community that protects it will slowly, over time, disappear behind signs, parking lots and commerce. And public access will not be increased but, rather, be reduced by further crowding and congestion. No public good will come from these ill-considered changes.

The Big Sur and South Coast LUACs, involved for sever years in an ongoing LUP update process, have taken a strong position against these proposed changes to the plan (<https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=92368>). After years of fruitless efforts to discuss these issues with the County and Coastal Commission, The Big Sur Defense Committee (BSDC), have decided to move forward with preparation for a legal challenge to the County's proposals for changes inconsistent with the Big Sur LUP. Over the next month we will seek major financial assistance for the development of materials, analysis and data to support our case. If successful with this fundraising, we hope to make significant public outreach to gather political and financial support beyond the community. There are thousands of people out there who love this coast and would like to see its traffic and management issues resolved but otherwise want Big Sur left alone.

The virus makes community gathering unlikely. We will find a way to organize, we need your help.

To kindness and the Coast,

Tim Green