



# Big Sur Destination Stewardship Plan

Prepared by:  
Beyond Green Travel

**Cover Photo: Comet Neowise streaks across Big Sur Skies in July 2020**  
**By Kodiak Greenwood Photography**

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<i>Carissa Chappellet</i>	<i>Lawyer and Board President, Big Sur Health Center</i>
<i>Kirk Gafill</i>	<i>President of Big Sur Chamber of Commerce and President/CFO of Nepenthe/Phoenix Corporation</i>
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## **List of Abbreviations**

BGT	Beyond Green Travel
BSLUP	Big Sur Land Use Plan
BSMAAC	Big Sur Multi-Agency Advisory Council
CABS	Community Association of Big Sur
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CHMP	Coast Highway Management Plan
CSUMB	California State University at Monterey Bay
Destination BC	Destination British Columbia
DMO	Destination Marketing Organization
DSP	Big Sur Sustainable Tourism Destination Plan
DUA	Day Use Area
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDS	Green Destinations Standard
GSST	Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria
IVUMC	Interagency Visitor Use Management Council
LPNF	Los Padres National Forest
LUAC	Land Use Advisory Committee
MCCVB	Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PMC	Parks Management Company
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLO	San Luis Obispo County
TDM	Sustainable Transportation Demand Management Plan
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
TOTA	Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USTOA	United States Tour Operators Association
USFS	United States Forest Service
VUM	Visitor Use Management
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

## **Executive Summary**

***“To protect and preserve the rugged, scenic, natural beauty of Big Sur and its cultural heritage, benefit the local economy, and foster a welcoming and sustainable community for generations to come.”***

***- Big Sur Destination Stewardship Plan Vision Statement***

In 1950, there were 25 million international tourist arrivals around the world. Fast forward to 2019, and that number grew to 1.5 billion, with ongoing predictions that it will reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2020). Despite wars, natural disasters, public health emergencies, terrorist attacks and political instability through the decades, tourism has maintained its steady rise over time. So, too, has a growing volume of research and case studies revealing that tourism can be both an opportunity and a threat to the very places where visitors seek to spend their time. The difference between what makes it an opportunity or a threat comes down to whether visitation is carefully planned and managed. That is the main objective of the Big Sur Sustainable Tourism Destination Stewardship Plan (DSP), which was commissioned by the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau (MCCVB) and the Community Association of Big Sur (CABS) to manage visitation in Big Sur in order to optimize tourism’s positive benefits and minimize its negative impacts.

The primary role of the DSP is to act as a medium through which Big Sur community stakeholders are enabled to successfully address specific challenges related to visitation by also leveraging other plans relevant to Big Sur, such as the Coast Highway Management Plan (CHMP) and, most importantly, the Big Sur Land Use Plan (BSLUP). While there is a general belief among stakeholders and community members that some of the visitation challenges facing Big Sur can be addressed within the BSLUP and CHMP, the DSP multi-stakeholder consultation process revealed that a majority believe that a separate management plan is needed to help advance solutions to some of the most pressing visitation-related problems facing Big Sur.

At its core, the DSP addresses challenges related to tourism that were identified through an extensive Big Sur multi-stakeholder process of meetings, interviews and surveys with Big Sur business owners, community members and residents, county, state, and federal officials, as well as local non-profit organizations and associations, all with a direct connection to Big Sur. In total, over the span of the 12-month DSP process, there were 178 small group and individual consultation meetings and nine large group stakeholder meetings. In addition, 131 stakeholder comments were submitted to the DSP website and there were 345 DSP Resident Surveys submitted, including from the Spanish-speaking community. A clear majority of the above stakeholders (some 75 percent) indicated their support for the DSP, with a similar majority indicating that doing nothing (maintaining the status quo) is no longer an option for Big Sur. As part of the DSP Resident Survey, for example, 80% of respondents strongly agreed that “Now is the time to plan for Big Sur’s future by taking action to manage visitation and tourism through a destination stewardship plan.”

Extensive review and synthesis of other Big Sur plans and reports, in conjunction with research into the history of visitation in Big Sur and case studies on sustainable tourism destination stewardship best practices from other parts of the USA and around the world, were also conducted.

While firm data on the total number of visitors to Big Sur remains elusive (one of the recommendations of the DSP is that more systematic and reliable visitation data be collected specific to Big Sur), the steady increase in tourism to both California and to Monterey County has been documented in recent years by Visit California’s research. (California Travel Impacts, 2020). The challenges of visitation in Big Sur are not new; historical documents cite that the first reference to Big Sur being overcrowded with visitors was in 1908 at Pfeiffer Beach. The BSLUP, published in 1986, further noted the need to “Optimize rather than maximize visitor use levels...” (BSLUP, Section 4.1) The increase in visitors in more recent years has led to growing recognition of the pressing need to better manage visitation in Big Sur.



Two-thirds of the way through the DSP process, the global coronavirus pandemic was declared, leading to a sudden and near-total collapse of the travel and tourism industry worldwide. California was no exception - visitation in the state was brought to a near standstill during a period of lockdown restrictions and as airline travel plummeted. And yet, as Shelter-In-Place orders began to be loosened and removed, Big Sur's attractions, including Soberanes Point, Garrapata State Park and Garrapata Beach, Bixby Bridge, Pfeiffer Beach, McWay Falls, and other popular recreation and dispersed camping areas saw a quick resurgence of visitation. It is increasingly clear that Big Sur will continue to be a popular place for visitors, as it has been in the past, continues to be currently, and is likely to remain in the future.

With the above in mind, now is the time to rethink and reset tourism for Big Sur through improved visitation planning, monitoring and management. This plan provides analysis and recommendations to support Big Sur to become a model for destination stewardship based upon the three key pillars of sustainable tourism:

- *Environmentally-friendly Practices*

This includes efforts to maintain a clean environment free from trash and litter, with proper disposal of waste; promoting clean energy to reduce carbon emissions; sourcing supplies as locally as possible; eliminating single-use plastics; and support for tracking and monitoring of environmental impacts and establishing benchmarks for improvements.

- *Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage*

This includes biodiversity conservation initiatives and programs, as well as helping to restore, maintain and protect natural habitat, which also serves as an important way to sequester carbon linked to reducing the negative impacts of climate change. Similarly, support for protecting cultural diversity includes preservation of historic buildings and sites of archeological significance; embracing local cultural vernacular in building design; and supporting living cultural heritage as it is represented through local artistic expression such as music, dance, art, and handicrafts, among others.

- *Support for the Economic and Social Well-Being of Local Communities*  
This includes tourism-related policies, programs and initiatives to benefit the people in the local area, including hiring locally according to fair wages, benefits, and non-discrimination policies that meet or exceed legal requirements; supporting local community-owned businesses to the greatest degree possible; and ensuring that local communities have direct and equal input on decision-making related to tourism that will affect their lives.

The DSP also aligns with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have been embraced globally as a priority for destination stewardship.

To identify the priority challenges that Big Sur faces, and to propose action-based solutions, two questions were kept in mind: Is the problem directly connected to visitation?; Are the solutions consistent with other key Big Sur plans, in particular, the BSLUP? This framed the overall scope for the DSP.

Big Sur faces many challenges, including the impacts of climate change on its natural environment, both on land and at sea; infrastructure limitations that are physical, in terms of Highway 1 as the primary access route into the area, as well as lack of cell phone service and wi-fi access; the multiple jurisdictions and complexities of land management and land use in Big Sur - across Federal, State, County agencies; private, non-profit, agricultural, commercial, and residential activities; regulations, laws, ordinances and ownership; different agency and organizational mandates and agendas; abilities to coordinate and collaborate across jurisdictions. Where these challenges intersect with visitation, they have been considered in developing the recommendations in this plan. These recommendations originate in the community-based multi-stakeholder process that guided the DSP process from the outset, and their intention is to present action-oriented visitation management strategies consistent with the BSLUP for further review and consideration towards implementation.

As has been mentioned, visitation to Big Sur is not new, nor are the challenges that visitation has posed to Big Sur. Given that there is no legal restriction or law that prevents visitors from coming to Big Sur to enjoy access to nature and outdoor recreation, visitation will continue into the future. Therefore, the key question is how visitation can be managed in a way that protects Big Sur's most precious attribute - its natural environment - while benefiting the local quality of life for its residents.

Solutions to visitation management problems have been put forward based upon a pragmatic approach of what is realistic and achievable, particularly at a time when the impact of the coronavirus pandemic has yet to fully play out; it is already known that the pandemic will result in significant limitations on available funds, particularly at the state and county levels, that could otherwise help to implement the DSP recommendations. Given that stark reality, the DSP includes a section on how to create a Big Sur "Sustainability Fund" in order to support the implementation of the plan, as well as provide an ongoing way to generate revenues to assist Big Sur in future community projects and needs.

The DSP Steering Committee should continue as a committee representing Big Sur's stakeholders to support further community discussion and understanding of the DSP, including its implementation consistent with supporting the protection of Big Sur's natural environment, and enabling its communities and the local economy to benefit and thrive. As such, the DSP envisions the "Big Sur Sustainability Fund" to also be rooted in Big Sur, with ongoing input from the DSP Steering Committee.

The DSP recommendations are outlined as a series of short term and long term actions, with different options presented for further consideration by the Big Sur community to deal with some of the most pressing challenges of visitation facing Big Sur today. These include:

### **Challenge: Funding for Implementing Solutions**

- *Establish a “Go Green” Day Pass to Generate Revenue*
- *Establish a Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” to Finance Solutions*
- *Establish a Big Sur “Community Corps” to Help Implement Solutions*

### **Challenge: Accurate Visitor Management Data**

- *Implement Visitor Count Data Collection*
- *Establish an Annual Traffic Count*
- *Establish a Process of Visitor and Resident Surveys*
- *Compile a Comprehensive Annual Data Summary*

### **Challenge: Visitor Traffic Management**

- *Increase Monitoring and Enforcement During Peak Holiday Periods at Key Visitation “Hotspots”*
- *Investigate and Evaluate Opportunities for Implementing Adaptive Traffic Management on Highway 1 to Improve Traffic Flow and Safety*
- *Re-Institute Sycamore Canyon Road/Pfeiffer Beach Shuttle*
- *Establish a Big Sur North Coast Shuttle*
- *Establish a Big Sur Valley Shuttle*
- *Establish a Big Sur South Coast Shuttle*

### **Challenge: Rethinking Bixby Bridge and Other Popular Visitation Areas**

- *Implement a 12-Month Pilot Program at Bixby Bridge to Eliminate All Visitor Stopping and Parking on Both East and West Sides of Highway 1 Before and After the Bridge, Including Old Coast Road*
- *Redesign the Bixby Bridge Visitor Experience*
- *Implement a Parking Reservation System at Pfeiffer Beach*
- *Eliminate All Parking on Highway 1 North and South of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park*
- *Implement a Parking Reservation System at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park*

**Challenge: Public Restroom Availability**

- *Improve Access and Provide Better Signage for Existing Restrooms*
- *Work with State and Federal Agencies Where Public Restrooms are Located to Ensure a Clear and Consistent Policy for Public Use*
- *Prioritize Sites Already Identified on State Park Land for Restrooms at Garrapata Beach, McWay Falls, Soberanes, and Partington Cove*
- *Consider Restrooms, if Consistent with the BSLUP, at Abalone Cove, the Vista Point North of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, and the Vista Point South of Big Creek*
- *Explore Tax Rebates and Incentives for Private Businesses to Expand Their Restroom Facilities to the Public*

**Challenge: Addressing Trash and Litter Problems**

- *Launch a “Keep Big Sur Clean and Pristine” Campaign*
- *Utilize Temporary Placement of Trash Receptacles during Peak Visitation Periods*
- *Create Incentives for Reducing Roadside Trash and Litter*

**Challenge: Back Country and Front Country Visitation Management**

- *Implement a Pilot Back Country Self-Directed Registration System to Gather Visitor Use Data*
- *Establish an Online Self-Registration and Permit System for the Back Country Trail Heads Accessed from the Big Sur Coast*
- *Restrict Front Country Overnight Dispersed Camping During Peak Wildfire Season*
- *Utilize “Community Corps” Members to Assist with Education and Information for Visitors*
- *Create a Back Country and Front Country Visitor Use Management Plan*

**Challenge: Visitor Education and Communication**

- *Launch a New Visitor Education and Communication Campaign Based on How to Enjoy and Protect Big Sur*

- *Strengthen information that Distinguishes Big Sur as a Place of Unique Experiences to Visit, Connect with Nature, and Care for the Environment*
- *Establish a Visitor Education Facility at the North and South Ends of the Big Sur Coast*

**Challenge: Available Community Housing**

- *Expand Accessory Dwelling Units and Address Short Term Rentals (These efforts are currently under review by Monterey County)*

Specific details on each of the actions presented above can be found beginning on page 55 of this plan.

There is no “magic bullet” that will quickly or easily address all visitation challenges and concerns facing Big Sur, but taken together, and in the spirit of compromise towards the greater good, this plan presents a bold agenda for both Big Sur and the state of California to show leadership in destination stewardship. Visitation to Big Sur provides benefits for the local economy, for Monterey County and also the State of California, but much more needs to be done to ensure that visitation, both current and future, is based upon careful planning, monitoring and management to create a better and more sustainable future for Big Sur’s environment and its communities. The DSP presents a road map to help get there.



## **About Beyond Green Travel**

Beyond Green Travel (BGT) is a professional sustainable tourism services and destination stewardship consulting firm with more than two decades of hands-on experience helping to define global sustainable tourism criteria and destination stewardship principles and practices. BGT has worked with states, regions, countries, communities, businesses, NGOs, multi-lateral agencies and municipalities on successfully implementing destination stewardship planning and management around the world.

In 1991, Costas Christ, founder of BGT, helped to officially define ecotourism for the first time as “responsible travel to natural areas that protects nature and sustains the well-being of local people” (TIES, 1991), principles that have helped to redefine tourism in natural areas. These ideas have subsequently evolved into the more holistic concept of sustainable tourism, based on three key pillars: environmentally-friendly operations; protection of natural and cultural heritage; and social and economic benefits for local people. BGT has since been recognized as a world leader in helping to transform the global travel industry to adopt sustainable tourism into action.

Making travel a force for good is BGT’s core mission, achieved through a diverse array of professional services including destination stewardship planning, sustainable tourism development, travel consumer awareness campaigns, education and training workshops, among others. Some of BGT’s past projects include: creating Bhutan’s national sustainable tourism plan; establishing a destination stewardship program for Gulf State Park, spanning two municipalities on Alabama’s coast; working with the town of Bar Harbor and Acadia National park on a sustainable tourism plan for Maine’s most popular tourism destination; developing a national sustainable tourism strategy for the government of Colombia; serving as strategic advisor to National Geographic and the World Travel and Tourism Council, among others. To learn more about Beyond Green Travel, please visit [www.beyondgreentravel.com](http://www.beyondgreentravel.com).

## **Introduction**

The tourism industry has become a dominant force in the global economy, providing one in every 10 jobs on the planet, and contributing over 10% to worldwide GDP (WTTC, n.d.). However, with this has come increasing pressure on local resources and communities around the world, which presents the difficult task of balancing economic opportunity with the conservation of nature, protection of cultural heritage and traditions, and the well-being of residents. To this end, destination stewardship based upon sustainable tourism practices promotes effective visitor management, enabling communities, regions, cities and even entire countries to responsibly plan and manage visitation that supports environmental protection and a better quality of life for local citizens.

Defined by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) as “a process by which local communities, governmental agencies, NGOs, and the tourism industry take a multi-stakeholder approach to maintaining the cultural, environmental, economic, and aesthetic integrity of their country, region, or town,” (GSTC, 2014) destination stewardship is a means through which destinations can become better equipped to handle both predictable visitation stressors and unforeseen challenges.

Some of the planet’s most popular destinations - from Venice to Barcelona to Bali - became cautionary tales for what can happen when visitation grows without proper policies and measures in place to manage and mitigate its negative impacts. These examples, along with others, demonstrate the pressing need for destinations to shift their attention from solely measuring success based on increasing numbers of visitors to focusing on how tourism can serve as a tool that protects their natural and cultural resources and benefits their citizens. This shift is taking place throughout the travel industry, including in California. Tourism boards and convention and visitors bureaus, often referred to as Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), with the primary role of growing tourism numbers, are increasingly evolving into Destination Management Organizations, working with local communities and businesses to create a coordinated plan to

help protect the very attractions that visitors want to experience. Indeed, this Big Sur Sustainable Tourism Destination Stewardship Plan is a result of this evolution, and is an opportunity to plan and manage visitation to better harness its benefits and address its negative impacts.

To understand destination stewardship today, it is important to also understand the history of ecotourism and its evolution into the principles of sustainable tourism, which is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” (UNWTO, n.d.)

Throughout the 1980s, nature-based tourism became a major growth sector in the global travel industry. However, local concerns began to arise as popular places faced with an increasing number of travelers were unprepared to manage visitation responsibly and equitably. Early problems associated with rapidly increasing visitation in places such as the Galápagos Islands and certain US national parks, among other areas, made it clear that a new and better model for tourism to natural areas was needed. Within a decade, the ideas that first started with ecotourism as a set of practices to address visitation’s negative impacts on the natural environment had evolved, amid calls that all forms of tourism - whether urban or rural, on land or at sea - should be centered on principles of fundamental respect for local people and the planet.

This became known as sustainable tourism, based on three key pillars:

- *Environmentally-friendly Practices*

This includes efforts to maintain a clean environment free from trash and litter, proper disposal of waste; promoting clean energy to reduce carbon emissions; sourcing supplies as locally as possible; eliminating single-use plastics; and support for tracking and monitoring of environmental impacts and establishing benchmarks for improvements.

- *Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage*

This includes biodiversity conservation initiatives and programs, as well as helping to restore, maintain and protect natural habitat, which also serves as an important way to sequester carbon linked to reducing the negative impacts of climate change. Similarly, support for protecting cultural diversity includes preservation of historic buildings and sites of archeological significance; embracing local cultural vernacular in building design; and supporting living cultural heritage as it is represented through local artistic expression such as music, dance, art, and handicrafts, among others.

- *Support for the Economic and Social Well-Being of Local Communities*

This includes tourism-related policies, programs and initiatives to benefit the people in the local area, including hiring locally according to fair wages, benefits, and non-discrimination policies that meet or exceed legal requirements; supporting local community-owned businesses to the greatest degree possible; and ensuring that local communities have direct and equal input on decision-making related to tourism that will affect their lives.

At the time, this pioneering concept was slow to take root, but support grew for the business notion of doing well by doing good, including protecting natural resources, embracing sense of place and authenticity, and uplifting the livelihoods of local people in travel destinations.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, South Africa and the launch of the “Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty” initiative was announced by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In 2008, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) were established by the United Nations Foundation to “represent the minimum requirements tourism businesses should observe in order to ensure preservation and respect of natural and cultural resources and make sure at the same time that tourism’s potential as a tool for poverty alleviation is enforced.” (UNWTO, n.d.)

Addressing the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental sustainability in development, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) introduced a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.” (UNDP, n.d.) The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as it is known, promotes sustainable tourism to generate employment, protect the environment and support local cultures.



Since their introduction, the SDGs have been adopted for successful destination stewardship and have continued to drive sustainable tourism best practices around the world. In 2017, the United Nations declared the International Year of Sustainable Tourism to promote destination stewardship policies, support best practices and educate travelers on the importance of sustainable tourism.

### **Bringing Destination Stewardship to Big Sur**

For the purposes of the DSP, Big Sur is defined based on the Big Sur Land Use Planning Area, from Mal Paso Creek in the north to the Monterey/San Luis Obispo County Line in the south, and inland from the Pacific Ocean to the coastal watershed ridgeline of the Santa Lucia Mountains. Stretching more

than 70 miles along this rugged coast, Big Sur's dramatic natural landscapes have long served as a source of inspiration for residents, visitors, artists and spiritual seekers alike. And thanks to a collection of strategic plans created by multiple jurisdictions over the years, Big Sur has managed to curtail mass development and largely maintain its distinctive sense of place.

However, as with many other areas in North America and around the world, visitation to Big Sur has placed increasing pressure on the region's natural environment, its biodiversity and environmental resources, its infrastructure and the local community, which in turn has sparked local residents to call for better planning and management of visitation. To address the influx of visitors without compromising the natural environment and well-being of residents, this destination stewardship plan was launched to help identify ways to reduce the negative impacts of visitation and optimize positive contributions to the environment, local economy and community way of life.

Visitation planning often involves a complex array of issues that present a unique set of place-specific challenges that cannot be solved with a one-size-fits-all approach. (WTTC, 2017) According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, the five most common problems associated with visitation stress on a destination are the growing alienation of local residents, degraded tourist experiences, insufficient infrastructure to handle visitation levels, damage to nature, and negative impacts on local ways of life and culture – all of which have been observed to varying degrees in Big Sur. While there is no universal solution, it is widely accepted that the most effective way of addressing these and similar visitation challenges, regardless of location, is through a destination stewardship plan that engages multi-stakeholders in the process.

The WTTC also advises that destinations follow tourism management best practices, such as compiling accurate data to inform decision-making, conducting long term planning strategies to encourage sustainable growth, and finding new sources of funding for implementing destination stewardship



recommendations. This plan addresses each of these points, culminating in a set of recommendations that address Big Sur's unique situation.

By implementing a sustainable tourism destination stewardship plan that carefully balances the needs of local stakeholders with environmental and social responsibility, visitation to Big Sur can help safeguard the very characteristics that attract both visitors and residents to the region, while benefiting the local community and enhancing the visitor experience. This can be attained through improved visitation planning, management and monitoring, and through partnerships that span the public and private sectors, resulting in a more resilient and sustainable future for Big Sur.

One of the most common misperceptions among stakeholders in considering a destination stewardship plan, often within the tourism business community, is that a destination must choose between sustainability and economic prosperity. In reality, the opposite is true. A closer look at destinations that have embraced sustainable tourism planning and management has consistently revealed that mitigating tourism's potential negative impacts on the environment, culture, and community has led to greater economic prosperity. This also reflects a shift in travel demand, with more travelers seeking out those places that allow for a great holiday while also helping to protect the planet and benefit local people.

When multiple stakeholders all work together to create a sustainable tourism destination stewardship plan, as Big Sur has done, they are also building a long term competitive advantage, enabling them to maintain a balance of economic, social, and environmental success. As James Thornton, CEO of Intrepid Travel (one of the world's foremost sustainable tourism companies) explains, "There's this idea that having a positive purpose or doing good has to somehow come at the expense of making a profit... Profits can and should help affect positive change on a global scale. The good news is, travelers want more

sustainable and ethical products, so [destination stewardship] is actually good for business.” (Center for Responsible Travel, 2019)

Global destinations are continuously adjusting to the changing tides in tourism by implementing new management policies and practices, and this will be no different in the post-coronavirus pandemic world of travel. A new equilibrium between safety, quality of life and visitation will emerge. But one thing that will not change is the need to focus on establishing more sustainable and equitable societies. This plan takes that understanding to heart and presents an outline for creating a sustainable tourism future for Big Sur.

## **DSP Vision and Methodology**

From the outset, the key goal for developing a destination stewardship plan for Big Sur was to ensure that it was a community-based process, recognizing Big Sur stakeholders across federal, state and county jurisdictions, along with non-profit organizations and businesses, private landowners and individual community members within the Big Sur Land Use area. Over the 12-month project, there were 178 small group and individual consultation meetings and nine large group stakeholder meetings. In addition, 131 stakeholder comments were received via the DSP website and there were 345 DSP Resident Surveys submitted, including members of the Spanish-speaking community. A three-week public comment period was included for the Draft DSP, and that feedback was reviewed for incorporation into the final plan.

A Destination Stewardship Plan Steering Committee was also established, representing Big Sur multi-stakeholders, with bi-monthly meetings held to provide input, feedback, and guidance to the project, including review, discussion, input, and support for the recommendations that form the key part of this plan. The DSP Steering Committee also created the guiding vision for the destination stewardship plan:

*“To protect and preserve the rugged, scenic, natural beauty of Big Sur and its cultural heritage, benefit the local economy, and foster a welcoming and sustainable community for generations to come.”*

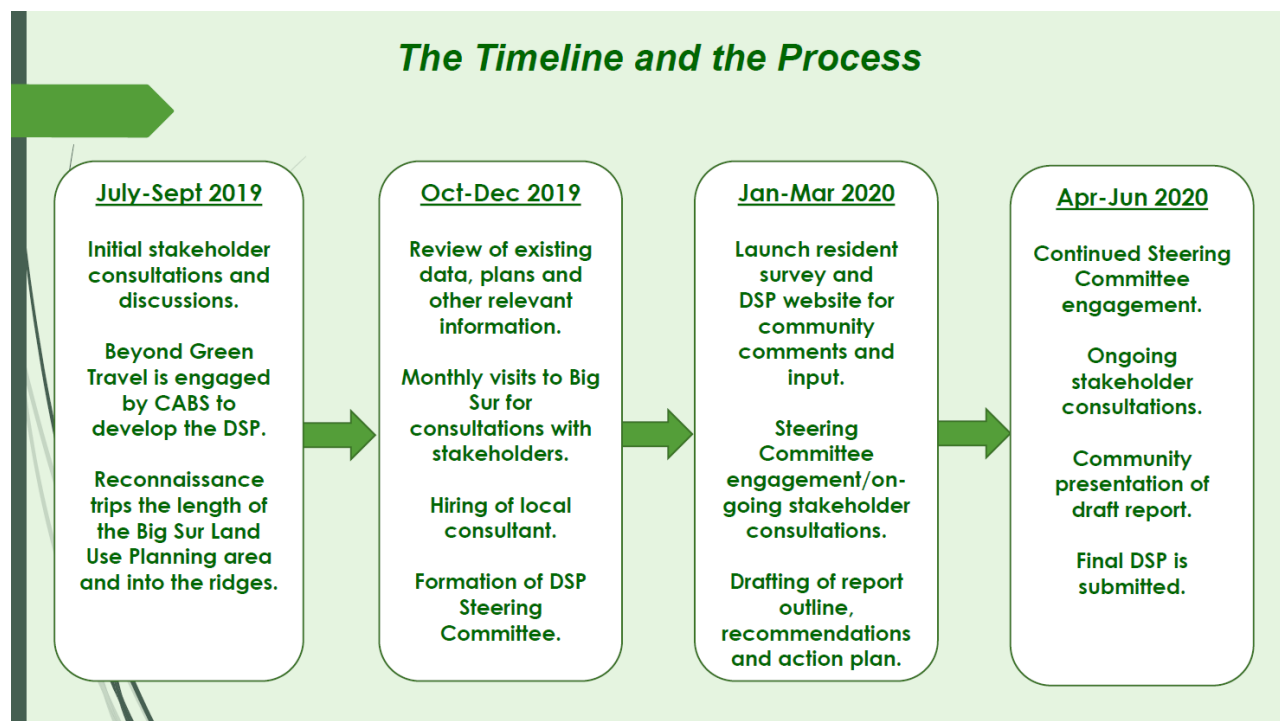
The DSP Steering Committee Members include:

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<i>Kirk Gafill</i>	<i>President of Big Sur Chamber of Commerce and President/CFO of Nepenthe/Phoenix Corporation</i>
<i>LaVerne McLeod</i>	<i>Author, Community Member and Co-Coordinator of Big Sur Advocates for a Green Environment (B-SAGE)</i>
<i>Lee Otter</i>	<i>Strategic Advisor, Big Sur Land Use Plan</i>

<i>Matt Harris</i>	<i>Fire Chief, Big Sur Fire</i>
<i>Mike Freed</i>	<i>Co-Chair, California Task Force on Destination Stewardship and Owner, Post Ranch Inn</i>
<i>Ryne Leuzinger</i>	<i>Board Member, Community Association of Big Sur and Senior Assistant Librarian, CSUMB</i>
<i>Yuri Anderson</i>	<i>Chief of Staff to Supervisor Mary Adams, County of Monterey, District 5</i>

Among others, two core questions guided the DSP process: Are the issues being addressed directly connected to visitation?; Are the recommendations also consistent with other key Big Sur plans, and in particular, the BSLUP? These two questions framed the overall scope of this plan.

Extensive reviews and syntheses of other Big Sur plans and reports were undertaken, in conjunction with research into the history of visitation in Big Sur and case studies of destination stewardship practices from other parts of the USA and around the world, all serving as part of the project methodology that resulted in this Destination Stewardship Plan.



## **History of Tourism in Big Sur**

Big Sur has a long and complex history of tourism, stretching back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Since then, the region has evolved from a difficult-to-traverse swath of nature surrounded by agrarian communities, to an iconic scenic-driving destination that attracts an estimated six million visitors annually, thanks to the construction of Highway 1 in the 1930s (Marcus, 2019). Through the decades, Big Sur has also served as a haven for waves of creative individuals and countercultural pioneers who found inspiration in its elemental nature - from applauded poet Robinson Jeffers to beatniks like Jack Kerouac to spiritual and wellness seekers flocking to the Esalen Institute. Author Henry Miller once described Big Sur as “the California men dreamed of years ago...It is the face of the Earth as the Creator intended it to look” - no doubt increasing its allure as a travel destination in the 1950s (Miller, 1957).

The region’s popularity has continued to grow, surging in recent years with the aid of social media and representation in pop culture, including films and TV shows, making the destination increasingly visible to a larger international audience. In turn, concerns about the growth in visitation have been raised by local residents, making it clear that there is a need to create a sustainable tourism visitation management plan to guide the preservation of Big Sur’s natural and cultural heritage while maximizing community benefits. While the coronavirus pandemic has upended the global travel industry, strategic steps should be taken now to achieve destination stewardship goals that will benefit Big Sur in the long term.

Dynamic tensions have existed between Big Sur’s residents and visitors for nearly as long as tourism dates back within the 70-mile stretch of rugged coastal wilderness, as have debates on how to best preserve the region’s environmental integrity and distinct sense of place. To fully understand the challenges and opportunities related to visitation in Big Sur today also requires an understanding of the region’s history of tourism.

For all purposes, the earliest tourist attraction in Big Sur emerged in the 1880s, when Thomas Slate established Slate's Hot Springs, recognizing the economic potential of sharing his property's healing sulfur baths with travelers for a price (Brooks, 2017). These same springs would eventually become a central feature of the Esalen Institute in the early 1960s and were later associated with the 'hot tub diplomacy' that is credited with helping to end the Cold War. (Laskow, 2015)

At the beginning of the 1900s, it was predicted that Big Sur's extractive industries would be overtaken by tourism's economic potential along the coast, and rustic resorts like Idlewild were already advertising the scenic drive south from Monterey along the dirt Coast Road as the most beautiful in the state. But when famed poet Robinson Jeffers arrived at Pfeiffer Ranch Resort, opened in 1908, he lamented that Big Sur was already "too crowded" - perhaps the first official record of someone saying that visitation had become a problem. The resort itself played a key role in helping to promote tourism in the region and would eventually become Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, which remains a key highlight of the visitor experience today.

However, further tourism development was hindered by the lack of a permanent coastal road that could withstand the elements and accommodate increasing numbers of visitors year-round. Even early on, tourism was recognized as an important driver of economic opportunity for the region and its residents, and as a result the need for better infrastructure was widely supported by local stakeholders. This would lead to the single most significant turning point in the history of Big Sur tourism: the construction of the ninety-seven-mile highway stretching from Carmel in the north to San Simeon in the south. Construction work on the two-lane road lasted from 1921 to 1937, and it became the first official scenic highway in the state, marking a milestone in California history. Just two weeks after it was opened on June 27, 1937, traffic along the road was already 60% higher than anticipated.



Highway 1 was strategically constructed to showcase the region's expansive coastal views, and it was immediately popular. Big Sur was identified as a tourist destination best experienced while driving, which held appeal for Americans interested in escaping their urban lives and experiencing pristine nature in the "last coastal frontier," as it was promoted at the time. The highway's most iconic landmark has always been Bixby Bridge, which hovers 260 feet in the air and is supported by a dramatic concrete arch. Predicting in 1924 that the opening of Highway 1 would increase land value while ushering in "a volume of tourist travel unsurpassed by any place in the state," the Pfeiffer family's private land was purchased by the state of California and became Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, which opened to the public in 1937.

The 1940s in Big Sur represented a fundamental shift in the region's local demographic, as ranchers and farmers were increasingly outnumbered by artists and writers who found creative refuge there. Removed from modern society, but still connected thanks to the new highway, Henry Miller once penned that Big Sur is "a region which corresponded to my notion of something truly American, something simple, primitive, and as yet unspoiled." (Miller, 1954) This independent, inspiring environment would serve as an incubator for the artistic expression and alternative thinking that would come to define Big Sur through the coming decades. The "primitive yet unspoiled" coast's promise of freedom would continue to draw increasing numbers of visitors in post-war America - ranging from families on driving vacations to disenfranchised 'beatnik' youth who were sharply critical of mainstream American culture.

Families who had called the coast home for generations became increasingly involved in land management and local governance issues. Tourism had replaced agriculture as the primary industry for the local economy, and a united community of stakeholders shared the desire to limit modern development through the region at a time when land values were surging, elaborate private residences were being built, and fears of an overcrowded landscape were emerging. As visitation to Big Sur continued to grow in the 1950s, residents

started pushing back more forcefully - and ultimately won the fight against a proposal to join Highway 1 into the state's expanding freeway system, arguing that it would damage the region's environment and natural beauty.

The pivotal year of 1962 would help shape the future of Big Sur, in large part thanks to the implementation of the Monterey County Coast Master Plan, which placed a strong emphasis on coastal conservation throughout the region. The progressive plan was considered by many people to be the most significant event in Big Sur since the construction of Highway 1, and it would become a guiding document for the state's wider focus on conservation from that point on. The Esalen Institute was also established in 1962 on a rocky Pacific precipice, marking the beginnings of what would become an international countercultural enclave in Big Sur - a place where Eastern and Western philosophy meets. Esalen sought to "explore and promote interconnections between heart and mind, soul and body, individual and society" through mind-expanding workshops and retreats. (Esalen, n.d.) As such, it became a meeting place and inspiration for much of the New Age culture that would come to define the 1960s in the United States, and its reputation as an epicenter of alternative living put Big Sur on the map for a new generation of visitors seeking enlightenment. It also attracted some of the great thought leaders of the time, including Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, Ansel Adams, and Timothy Leary, among others. Esalen continues to draw visitors today from around the globe to its picturesque grounds, with innovative programs focused on healing, wellness and mindfulness surrounded by nature.

Visitation in Big Sur throughout the 1960s was increasingly defined by American families cruising and camping along Highway 1, as well as an eclectic collection of spiritual seekers and nature lovers who found freedom in the region's wide-open spaces and off-the-grid lifestyle. Significantly, this included the arrival of the "hippies," who flocked to private ranches, national redwood forests and State Park lands during the cultural era of "free love" and psychedelic drug use. Not surprisingly, the freewheeling lifestyle of the hippies included living out of vehicles and camping along the roadside in a refusal to follow "establishment"

land laws, which provoked debate among residents on how to best manage the growing influx of “tune in and drop out” visitors. Residents complained that the hippies brought risks of fire hazards, public sanitation problems, and they also upset paying tourists. This spurred petitions and strong anti-hippie sentiments among the local population of Big Sur, made worse by the environmental concerns attributed to them, most notably a 1972 wildfire caused by an illegal campfire. While originally drawn to the promise of Big Sur’s independent way of life, the region’s rising land prices, increasing number of affluent property owners, and antagonism from the local community made Big Sur less hospitable to the waning hippie generation of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Meanwhile, another countercultural movement was gaining momentum across the country, led by back-to-the-land advocates Helen and Scott Nearing, whose popular 1970s book, *Living The Good Life: How to Live Simply and Sanely in a Troubled World*, inspired a new generation of homesteaders who protested environmental degradation and social injustice by moving to rural regions of the country, seeking to restore ecological balance through sustainable and organic agriculture. Again, Big Sur proved to be a key place to relocate, and this “back-to-the-land” ethos still percolates throughout the region today.

By the early 1980s, Big Sur started to move into the tourism mainstream, attracting some three million visitors annually, surpassing Yosemite National Park in popularity. Tourism was also increasingly connected to discussions regarding the need to protect the Big Sur coastline from any further development, given that the experience of driving Highway 1 was the destination’s primary scenic attraction. A major milestone occurred in 1986 with the creation of the Big Sur Land Use Plan (BSLUP), certified by the Coastal Commission under the California Coastal Act. Within the BSLUP, the Critical Viewshed policy effectively blocked development within sight of Highway 1 and other important public viewing areas, protecting the scenic vistas along the coast for future generations. This plan is one of the main reasons that Big Sur has successfully preserved its aesthetic character. At the same time, the stunning views and largely unspoiled nature of Big Sur,

touted in tourism marketing campaigns, continued to attract more visitors. In 1999, *National Geographic Traveler* magazine named Big Sur as one of the fifty greatest destinations on earth, calling it a prime example of civilization and nature in harmony thanks to its unique combination of striking environment and cultural richness, animated by a devoted local community. (National Geographic, 1999)

By the 2010s, the rise of smartphones, social media, and enhanced marketing efforts, as well as popular TV shows and films, made Big Sur more visible to a global audience increasingly connected by sophisticated information technology. An opening scene of Bixby Bridge in the critically acclaimed HBO series *Big Little Lies*, along with tourism marketing that used the show's popularity to promote visitation to Monterey County, where the show takes place, led to increased traffic congestion and unsafe parking conditions in peak periods at places like Bixby Bridge. Instagram influencers hired to promote California as a travel destination also used Big Sur's landscapes as a backdrop, putting the coast on many travel bucket lists, which in turn helped fuel the 'selfie culture' of those wanting to capture similar images.

While tensions between residents and visitors in Big Sur date back generations, key scenic "hotspots" began to be overwhelmed during this period due to limited facilities, infrastructure, and law enforcement to address visitation problems. Traffic jams and roadside litter became two primary concerns along Highway 1, which by some estimates sees 4.6 million one-way driving trips annually. A devastating 2016 wildfire caused by an illegal campfire raised further alarm about the need to act to manage visitation more proactively. (Marcus, 2019)

At the same time, the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau reported that travelers spent more than \$3 billion in Monterey County in 2018, which rose to \$3.2 billion in 2019. (Dean Runyon, 2020) Given Big Sur's long history of visitation and a regional economy strongly reliant on tourism, it became increasingly clear that a strategic path forward was needed. This DSP serves that purpose, as a way to help Big Sur responsibly manage visitation to optimize the economic benefits of

tourism while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and the local way of life.

With the advent of the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic, indications are that there will likely be a dramatic shift in both where and how people travel in a post-pandemic world. Tourism was one of the first and hardest hit economic sectors, and it is predicted that it will be among the last to fully recover. (UNWTO, 2020) It is also likely that domestic travel in small groups to natural areas away from crowds will be quicker to rebound than international travel, and all tourism market indicators show that emphasis will be on driving vacations in the first phase of post-pandemic recovery. (Buhalis, 2020) While it is uncertain if and when tourist arrivals will return to their pre-pandemic levels, industry predictions favor places like Big Sur to continue to be popular attractions both in the near term and the long term. Big Sur now has an opportunity to reset and rethink visitation with this DSP, equipping it to better deal with the future ebbs and flows of the travel industry.

## **Big Sur Plans: A Legacy to Build On**

In Big Sur, four key land use planning documents exist which all hold one common theme – to preserve and protect Big Sur. At their heart, these plans recognize that Big Sur is a unique place in California and in the world. While development does exist, human activity has been minimized and largely kept out of view from Highway 1. Proper implementation of these plans, and legislation such as the California Coastal Act, ensure the successful protection of Big Sur into the future.

The California Coastal Act of 1976 and its corresponding California Coastal Commission has the broadest regulatory authority and a jurisdiction that covers the entire 1,072-miles of California coastline. Under the Act, the Big Sur Land Use Plan (BSLUP) was certified by the California Coastal Commission in 1986 and became part of Big Sur’s Local Coastal Program. In 2004 and 2020, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) completed two efforts that engaged both the Big Sur community and agency stakeholders to tackle highway safety and efficiency while preserving the natural and scenic character of the corridor. The Coast Highway Management Plan (CHMP) and the Sustainable Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDM) each span more than one land use plan area. All four plans overlap in the Big Sur Land Use Plan area. The region begins at Mal Paso Creek in the north and runs south along the coast to the Monterey-San Luis Obispo County line, extending inland to the coastal watershed ridgeline of the Santa Lucia Mountains. All development is governed by the BSLUP.

Whether it is the Coastal Act’s declaration that “the permanent protection of the state’s natural and scenic resources is a paramount concern to present and future residents of the state and the nation,” or the vision of the BSLUP “to preserve for posterity the incomparable beauty of the Big Sur country, its special cultural and natural resources, its landforms and seascapes and inspirational vistas,” land management plans have preserved Big Sur and successfully created a quality of visual timelessness. For this reason, it is not uncommon to hear Big Sur referred to as “the last best place.”

The vision for the CHMP was “to provide a framework for restoring, maintaining and preserving the natural and scenic character of the corridor while continuing to operate the highway in a safe and efficient manner.” (Caltrans, 2004) In 2020, Caltrans completed a second management plan along the same stretch of Highway 1, which builds upon the CHMP to address the increased levels of automobile travel along the corridor. The TDM was developed to “preserve the rugged and scenic nature of the Big Sur experience for all people through balanced, adaptive management strategies that encourage the use of transit and active transportation to enhance the travel experience and support sustainable corridor access.” (Caltrans, 2020) Like both the Coastal Act and the BSLUP that preceded them, these two planning documents share the same preservation goals for Big Sur.

This section of the DSP will synthesize the key elements of these four documents, as well as touch upon the California Coastal Trail and the Big Sur Multi-Agency Council (BSMAAC), all of which are relevant to destination stewardship planning for Big Sur.

### **The California Coastal Act and Big Sur’s Local Coastal Program**

In 1972 California voters passed Proposition 20, which led to the State Legislature’s adoption of the California Coastal Act in 1976. The Act assigned coastal development permitting authority to the California Coastal Commission or to local jurisdictions with local coastal programs certified by the Commission. In Big Sur, the Local Coastal Program provides the policies and actions to guide development, habitat protection, and coastal access.

For the purposes of the DSP, it is important to highlight key policies and goals within Big Sur’s Local Coastal Program. The local coastal program was developed to protect and preserve Big Sur’s wild and scenic beauty, the very qualities that visitors to the region come to appreciate and experience. It achieves this goal by assigning land use designations on all public and private lands. A key policy that governs all future land use development is that “all proposed uses, whether

public or private, must meet the same exacting environmental standards and must contribute to the preservation of Big Sur’s scenery.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986)

Big Sur’s coastal zone extends inland to the coastal watershed ridgeline of the Santa Lucia Mountains, often described as “one of the nation’s most majestic meetings of land and sea.” Michael Fischer, former executive director of the California Coastal Commission, remarked in 1980 to then Congressman Leon Panetta, “The awesome panoramas uncluttered by man’s structures ... make this ... stretch of the California Coast a national resource of inestimable value.” Fischer warned that “the decisions which this generation will make for Big Sur will determine its future character – and significant degradation could be the unfortunate result.” (Brooks, 2017).

The BSLUP was adopted by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors and certified by the California Coastal Commission in 1986. The Big Sur Local Coastal Program, which consists of the BSLUP, an implementation plan, and coastal zoning, guides development in the Big Sur Land Use Plan area. The BSLUP has not been amended or updated since its adoption in 1986. An effort to revise and update the plan is currently underway by the Big Sur and South Coast Land Use Advisory Committees (LUACs), which includes fuel fire mitigation and community wildfire protection updates, as well as an intensified focus on preserving and protecting the Big Sur community.

Tension over coastal access has existed between stakeholders drafting the BSLUP and the Coastal Commission since the earliest days of the Coastal Act. Shelley Alden Brooks, U.C. Davis professor and author of the 2017 book, *Big Sur: The Making of a Prized California Landscape*, notes that Big Sur “became a key place to hash out developing ideas regarding the proper relationship between Californians and their prized coastal landscape.” (Brooks, 2017)

What was ultimately adopted is a plan to protect, provide, and manage public access in order to enhance the visitor experience while assuring preservation of



the natural environment, the need to ensure public safety, and to protect the rights of private property owners. Key Policy 6.1.3 states:

*“The rights of access to the shoreline, public lands, and along the coast, and opportunities for recreational hiking access, shall be protected, encouraged, and enhanced.*

*Yet because preservation of the natural environment is the highest priority, all future access must be consistent with this objective. Care must be taken that while providing public access, the beauty of the coast, its tranquility and the health of its environment are not marred by public overuse or carelessness. The protection of visual access should be emphasized throughout Big Sur as an appropriate response to the needs of recreationists. Visual access shall be maintained by directing all future development out of the viewshed. The protection of private property rights must always be of concern.”*

*(Monterey County Planning, 1986)*

Karin Strasser Kauffman, the Monterey County Supervisor representing Big Sur at the time of adoption, described public access to the *Los Angeles Times* as, “We encourage people to pass through. We want them to have a stunning - but brief - experience. We want to protect what people value most about Big Sur - just to stand on the coast, make a full-circle turn and look at nature in every direction.” (Brooks, 2017)

Hiking and backpacking, popular recreational activities in Big Sur, also address the Coastal Commission’s public access priority. Most trails in Big Sur are in public ownership. These public access points require “adequate management,” which is recommended in the BSLUP prior to the addition of any new public access points. The BSLUP recommends using “the existing system as much as possible, and to improve existing but deteriorating trails, where needed, to provide more evenly distributed access.” Problems of “degradation from unmanaged use or overuse” were already common when the Plan was drafted, in addition to “problems of litter and sanitation” and public safety. (Monterey County Planning, 1986)

Though the BSLUP was drafted prior to the California Coastal Trail legislation, the plan does make reference to “a continuous trails system in a north-south direction” that “would offer a unique recreational experience for both the coastal visitor and the resident.” In 2001, State Senate Bill 908 was signed into law, which requires the State Coastal Conservancy, “in consultation with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the California Coastal Commission, to coordinate the development of the California Coastal Trail ... along the state’s coastline from the Oregon border to the border with Mexico.” (California State Legislature, 2001) With the help of State Senator Bill Monning, Big Sur residents and property owners have engaged in a grassroots community-based process to provide input for the Big Sur segment of the California Coastal Trail.

The mission for the Coastal Trail Working Group is “to guide the planning and implementation of the California Coastal Trail through Big Sur, in a way that protects the ecosystems of the Big Sur Coast, and the Big Sur Community, for the benefit of our visitors, residents, and landowners alike.” (Big Sur CCT, n.d.) As part of Phase 1, local workgroups are designing segments of the trail, an effort that has been ongoing for almost a decade.

Perhaps the most critical and effective feature of the BSLUP is the Critical Viewshed policy. Prohibiting development visible from Highway 1 has contributed to the preservation of the natural beauty of the Big Sur coast for decades. The critical viewshed policy was incorporated to protect “the aesthetic and scenic qualities and semi-wilderness character” of Big Sur. The policy prohibits development anywhere “within sight of Highway 1 and major public viewing areas.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986) Exceptions to the policy exist in Big Sur’s four rural community centers as well as at Rocky Point Restaurant, Big Sur Inn, and Coast Gallery because these locations “provide essential services to the community and visiting public, and shall be permitted under careful design and siting controls.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986)

An exception also exists for parking and other low intensity support facilities for State Park units along the Big Sur coast. The BSLUP requires that new parking facilities are developed “at off-highway locations rather than on the Highway One shoulder” and also states that “the creation of new parking lots between Highway One and the ocean shall be avoided wherever possible to avoid detracting from scenic coastal views.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986)

Another exception is provided for coastal-dependent uses such as “minimal public access improvements on the beach along shoreline lateral accessways, such as litter collection facilities and rustic stairways.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986) These coastal-dependent uses may be permitted provided that there are no reasonable alternatives to site the development outside the critical viewshed, and that there will be no significant adverse impact resulting from the proposed development.

The BSLUP recognizes “the Coastal Act’s goal of encouraging public recreational use and enjoyment of the coast while ensuring that the very resources that make the coast so valuable for human enjoyment are not spoiled.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986) Limitations are placed on the numbers of campground sites, lodging facilities, and residences. The density standards within the BSLUP are designed to protect “the capacity of Highway One to accommodate recreational use, the avoidance of overuse in areas of the coast, and the need for development to respect the rural character of the Big Sur Coast and its many natural resources.” (Monterey County Planning, 1986)

In an effort to manage recreation uses, the BSLUP calls for additional funding to “be allocated by the State and Federal governments to manage and maintain existing public recreation areas before more public land is opened to recreational use.” The establishment of visitor information centers near each end of the Big Sur coast are recommended as part of the Plan’s implementation that “will be for the convenience of travelers, will assist in reducing unnecessary traffic on Highway 1, and will help coordinate operation of private and public recreational facilities.” Additional roadside restrooms in Big Sur “consistent with viewshed and

resource protection criteria” are also part of the Plan’s implementation recommendations. (Monterey County Planning, 1986)

While there is more to both the California Coastal Act and the Big Sur Local Coastal program, what has been included in this section are the goals, values, and principles relevant to the planning process for the DSP.

### **Coast Highway Management Plan (CHMP)**

In 1996, a 72-mile stretch of Highway 1 along the Big Sur coast was designated an “All-American Road,” an honor recognized by the highest levels of the U.S. Government. According to the Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration, All-American Roads are “generally reserved for routes considered destinations in themselves.” The Big Sur Coast Highway is one of only 39 All-American Roads across the nation and serves as a major tourist attraction. (U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.)

The corridor is the only north-south route for residents and businesses to reach commercial centers on either end of the coast, and current legislation prevents the implementation of tolls on the highway. Highway 1 is Big Sur’s lifeline, and when closures occur the regional and local economy suffers, emergency services are compromised, many residents cannot work, and children may be cut off from school. The lack of detours has the potential to trap residents on what was described in 2017 as “the island of Big Sur.” (Krieger, L.M., 2017)

In preparation for the All-American Roads nomination, a Corridor Management Plan was drafted. In Big Sur, a long term planning effort had already been underway since a 1983 landslide closed Highway 1 for a full year. After El Niño storms brought more landslides and highway closures in 1998, Caltrans launched a stakeholder process with the goal to move “away from a crisis-driven approach that can result in poor decisions with unintended consequences.” (Caltrans, 2004) Its Steering Committee, comprised of agency representatives, elected officials and residents, worked together “to provide a framework for restoring, maintaining

and preserving the scenic character of the corridor while continuing to operate the highway in a safe and efficient manner.” (Caltrans, 2004)

The CHMP identifies storm damage response and repair, maintenance practices, scenic and habitat conservation, public access and recreation, and plan implementation as the major issues and concerns along the corridor. As stipulated by the California Coastal Act, Highway 1 in rural areas of the Coastal Zone shall remain two-lane. Recognizing Highway 1’s capacity, the CHMP calls for “creative solutions ... to sustain the conditions that make traveling the highway a pleasure.” Marketing to the area is discouraged and instead “preservation of place relies in part on controlling the intensity of use.” (Caltrans, 2004)

Several tensions between the needs and considerations of visitors and residents are identified in the CHMP. Public access must be maintained but many of the strategies to better meet the needs of visitors contradict the very essence of the Big Sur Coast experience “to be in a rugged natural environment and enjoy the spectacular views.” (Caltrans, 2004) No signage, bus stops, cell towers, bathrooms, and facilities for interpretation, can become “visual clutter” along the corridor. The CHMP lists among its core values: “The need to provide access must uphold the value of preserving the informal visitor experience and be balanced with adequate resource protection to ensure appreciation and enjoyment of these resources for generations to come.” (Caltrans, 2004)

Managing travel along Highway 1 is guided by principles intended “(1) to provide information about traveling and enjoying the Big Sur Coast; (2) to provide opportunities to pull off the highway for various purposes; (3) to manage connections between the highway and neighboring facilities; and (4) to provide safe conditions for non-motorized touring.” (Caltrans, 2004) Locations for visitor information, facilities and amenities, and implementation of the California Coastal Trail are all strategies within the CHMP Action Plan.

While the CHMP is not a regulatory document and Caltrans remains the responsible agency for many of the strategies and actions in the plan, the CHMP does “set forth a vision and framework for decision-making that is inclusive and that results in improved interagency coordination and better community involvement.” (Caltrans, 2004) The CHMP was meant “to be a living document that is continually updated” which relies on an implementation management team to complete this objective. In Chapter 6, it recommends a “Byway Organization” as a successor to the CHMP Steering Committee that would “represent diverse stakeholder interests, work closely with the community and involve the public in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration.” The purpose of the Byway Organization would be to “implement a program of actions to carry out the goals and policies of the [CHMP] Plan.” (Caltrans, 2004)

The CHMP has contributed to the greater body of land use planning documents along the Big Sur Coast that have ensured that development that does occur “is harmonious with the area and that both resource protection and community preferences are reflected in policy.” (Caltrans, 2004) Although “the CHMP does not alter any lines of authority or jurisdiction set forward by the Coastal Act,” and the Big Sur Local Coastal Program “remains the standard of review for development actions,” preservation of the natural and scenic character of the corridor is as prominent in the CHMP as it is in planning documents that preceded it. As with the Coastal Act and the BSLUP, only portions of the Big Sur CHMP that are relevant to the DSP have been elaborated upon here.

### **Big Sur Highway 1 Sustainable Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDM)**

In 2018, Caltrans began an effort to address the challenges the Big Sur Highway 1 corridor faces due to increasing popularity. The Big Sur Highway 1 Sustainable Transportation Demand Management Plan (TDM), completed in February 2020, warns that, “without thoughtful planning ... to plan for and incentivize alternative ways to access the corridor, Big Sur’s massive popularity could eventually damage the very scenic qualities and natural beauty that make the area so precious.” (Caltrans, 2020) Managing the large numbers of visitors to the region and their

impacts on the resource has become an increasing source of frustration for residents and a challenge for land managers.

The TDM describes significant ways in which the behaviors of visitors to Big Sur have changed in recent years. “The promotion of specific Big Sur experiences by marketing agencies, television shows, and - most notably - social media often encourage users to visit only a few locations which can quickly become overwhelmed. ‘Selfie Culture’ has become ingrained in the way people travel, often dictating which sights people visit. It creates ‘bucket list’ places, where people go to the place, capture images proving they were there, and move on to the next location.” (Caltrans, 2020)

The highest concentration of vehicles along the corridor are recreation related, with visitation at its peak in spring and summer months. Many of these ‘bucket list’ locations correspond with corridor “hotspots” where the most severe transportation issues occur. Soberanes, Garrapata State Park, Bixby Creek Bridge, Sycamore Canyon Road/Pfeiffer Beach and McWay Falls are all identified in the TDM as locations where parking activity is highest. Access points along the corridor for day hiking and backpacking are also easily overwhelmed with cars and create unsafe traffic conditions, moving and parking violations, problematic pedestrian behavior, along with frustration for residents and visitors alike.

The TDM’s vision “is to preserve the rugged and scenic nature of the Big Sur experience for all people through balanced, adaptive management strategies that encourage the use of transit and active transportation to enhance the travel experience and support sustainable corridor access.” (Caltrans, 2020) Like the CHMP, the TDM is not a regulatory document. Instead, it builds upon the CHMP and the BSLUP to provide a framework for engagement and collaboration among the public and land managers. The tools and strategies within the TDM are geared toward moving the traveling public out of single-occupancy vehicles and into alternative modes of transportation, including transit, shuttles, biking, and walking.

The TDM provides opportunities to improve the overall corridor experience by influencing visitor behavior and their transportation choices. TDM strategies and approaches are organized in six categories: transit and shuttle services, infrastructure enhancements, traveler information, active transportation, parking management and enforcement, and data collection and analysis. The following guiding principles for implementation of TDM strategies were informed by previous plans and in meetings with stakeholders. The guiding principles include: *Organized yet Independent Travel Experience; Iconic Visual Access is of Primary Importance; Respect for Environment and Community; Responsive and Action-Oriented with Adaptive and Innovative Strategies; Balanced; and Inclusive.* (Caltrans, 2020)

While the TDM suggests strategies for public and private land managers, property owners, agencies, and organizations to consider, the TDM recognizes the need to work collaboratively and does not include an implementation plan. Because of issues of multi-agency and multi-county jurisdiction, no single agency can alone address the issues associated with visitation and public access, and the TDM suggests that Monterey County formally develop the Big Sur Byway Organization that is recommended in the CHMP. The Big Sur Byway Organization would serve “to clarify issues, provide a forum for stakeholders to be heard, and to interpret the plan recommendations to the public.” Like the CHMP, the TDM must be broadly owned and kept alive to have an impact.

In 2019, the MCCVB offered to provide administrative support for the Byway Organization, which allowed its formation to move forward. In April 2019, the District 5 Supervisor put forward a resolution to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors “establishing the Big Sur Byway Organization as part of implementing the Big Sur Coast Highway Management Plan.” (Monterey County Board Report, 30 April 2019). The resolution passed and it is anticipated that the recommendations of the TDM and the DSP may also be considered by the Byway Organization, once it is fully established as expected in 2020.



### **Big Sur Multi-Agency Advisory Council (BSMAAC)**

The BSLUP was drafted in response to the passage of the California Coastal Act and a long battle against various proposals for the Federal Government to manage Big Sur. In the late 1980s, Congressman Leon Panetta created the Big Sur Multi-Agency Council (BSMAAC) to ensure that Monterey County would maintain primary land management authority in Big Sur. The BSMAAC brings together all levels of government, all agencies with land management authority, and residents to work together to preserve Big Sur and meet the goals of Big Sur's Local Coastal Program.

The BSMAAC meets quarterly at the Big Sur Lodge Conference Center at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The meeting is hosted by the 20<sup>th</sup> Congressional District Representative and the 5<sup>th</sup> District Monterey County Supervisor. The council includes one representative from each of the following: the North Coast of Big Sur, the South Coast of Big Sur, the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce, the Community Association of Big Sur, the Monterey County Planning Department, the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District, the California Coastal Commission, the California Department of Transportation, California State Parks, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the United States Forest Service, the 30<sup>th</sup> District State Assembly Member, and the 17<sup>th</sup> District State Senator.

The BSMAAC provides the opportunity for multi-agency coordinated planning. Overlapping jurisdictions in Big Sur create management challenges that frustrate residents and agencies alike. Large infrastructure projects that may be key to Big Sur's economy or that simply allow residents to move safely to and from their homes often require input and approval from multiple agencies. Challenges such as wildfire protection and management may follow different rules and regulations depending on which public agency manages the land. And, a common refrain from all agencies is that funding is rarely available to meet the region's needs.

The BSMAAC is a tool unique to Big Sur and is key to successful preservation and protection of Big Sur into the future. The BSMAAC also provides the opportunity

to involve the community directly with the CHMP, the TDM, the California Coastal Trail, and the BSLUP update.

The development of the DSP has been guided by and builds upon the core elements of these four plans as they relate to visitation, with the synthesis at the center of these plans - preserving and protecting Big Sur - also representing one of the three key pillars of sustainable tourism destination stewardship.

## **Big Sur Stakeholder Priorities and Survey Results**

While 2020 began in much the way that 2019 ended, with local concerns about too many visitors coming to Big Sur, noting the ongoing issues of particular “hotspots” being overrun, and illegal activity in the back country on trails and in front country dispersed camping areas, the arrival of the global coronavirus pandemic quickly changed things, with hotels, restaurants and other visitor services being shut down out of concerns for public health. As a result, visitation plummeted. Yet, despite this drop in visitor numbers, challenges in Big Sur continued. State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service initially tried to keep some public access areas open for recreational activities for Monterey County residents. But difficulty in monitoring and enforcement eventually led to the full closure of all State Parks and U.S. Forest Service recreational areas and Forest Service roads in Big Sur.

The takeaway was that even during a time when few tourists ventured away from home, Big Sur continued to attract visitors, including traffic congestion and illegal vehicle movement and parking activity at Bixby Bridge. The Big Sur front country, defined as areas accessible from Highway 1 by motorized vehicle for the purposes of dispersed car camping and other recreational activities, in particular, continued to face illegal activity, with campfires, trash, and human waste left behind in closed dispersed camping areas. At the start of the official “fire season,” an illegal campfire led to a 20+ acre fire on Plaskett Ridge, the first of two in the month of June. Against this backdrop, implementing a solution-oriented DSP for Big Sur should remain a priority.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement, including the guidance of the DSP Steering Committee, multiple stakeholder consultations in Big Sur, a review of pertinent research and land use documents, ongoing monitoring of local news and current events, and a Resident Survey carried out during February-March 2020, all contributed to identifying the key visitation challenges facing Big Sur.

## Key Stakeholder Concerns



- Poor visitor behavior
- Public restroom access and availability
- Littering and trash disposal
- Traffic impacts to health and safety
- Dispersed backcountry camping and fire risks
- Lack of monitoring and enforcement (illegal camping, road safety, parking, etc.)
- Environmental degradation
- Lack of visitor information/education
- Affordable housing
- Funding and resources

Many of these issues are interrelated and the recommendations to address them in the DSP are also interrelated as well.

Approximately 26% of Big Sur's land area is privately owned, while the other 74% is managed by a mosaic of state and federal agencies, including California State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service (Los Padres National Forest) (Diehl, 2006), which are the focus of most visitation in terms of areas accessible to the public. Big Sur's 1,700 or so residents (American Community Survey, 2018) are scattered amidst these public and private landscapes, and include descendants of the Native American peoples who first inhabited Big Sur (Esselen, Salinan, and Ohlone peoples), as well as offspring of early settlers who worked the land as ranchers, loggers, and miners, along with local businesses and their employees, private landowners who live in Big Sur full time, others who have second homes there while they primarily reside elsewhere, as well as more recent transplants and newcomers who now make their home in Big Sur.

The Big Sur Resident Survey asked residents to respond to a series of questions regarding their views about tourism in Big Sur, problems created by visitation,

and potential solutions that could be implemented to improve visitation for visitors and residents alike that grew out of multi-stakeholder discussions and DSP Steering Committee meetings. Offered in English and Spanish, the survey drew 345 responses, with 63% of respondents indicating they were residents of Big Sur, and 37% indicating that, while not residents at this time, they had substantive ties to Big Sur. 72% of respondents indicated that they work in Big Sur, with 39% indicating that they are employed in a job that depends on tourism.

Across multiple questions in the survey, respondents identified managing visitation as a significant challenge, and confirmed their support for implementing a visitation management plan that will help to better protect Big Sur now and into the future. Survey results identified poorly monitored and managed visitation causing safety hazards, visitor traffic jams and unsafe driving behavior as the biggest challenge to residents (Q12). Over 80% of respondents *Strongly Agreed* that “Now is the time to plan for Big Sur's future by taking action to manage visitation and tourism through a destination stewardship plan.” (Q15)

Highlights from the survey results include the following:

Q11 When thinking about what is most important to you as a resident and/or worker in Big Sur, please rank from Most Important (1) to Least Important (7):

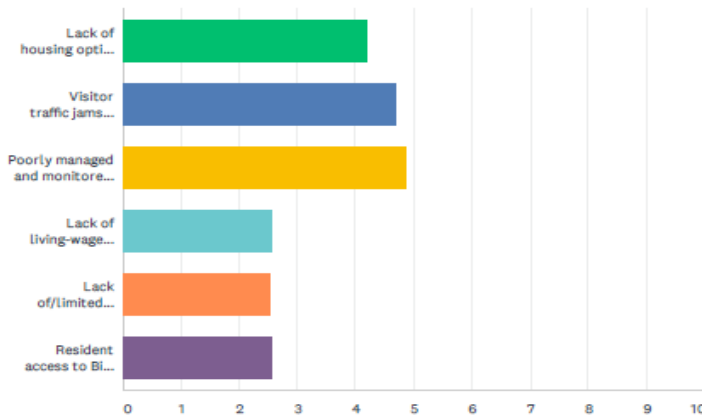


When asked what was most important to them, respondents want to ensure that Big Sur’s natural environment is protected as their first priority, followed by wanting to be able to live and work in Big Sur, and wanting visitation to be managed so that Big Sur residents can continue to enjoy their way of life.

Big Sur Sustainable Destination Stewardship Plan: Resident Survey

Q12 Please rank the following challenges for Big Sur Residents from Most Important (1) to Least Important (6):

Answered: 298 Skipped: 42



	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Lack of housing options in Big Sur, requiring workers to commute long distances.	34.34% 91	13.58% 36	18.49% 49	13.96% 37	10.57% 28	9.06% 24	265	4.20
Visitor traffic jams and unsafe driving behavior on Highway 1, impacting daily life for residents and workers.	25.47% 68	40.07% 107	19.10% 51	10.11% 27	3.75% 10	1.50% 4	267	4.69
Poorly managed and monitored visitation, creating safety hazards such as illegal campfires, overburdening emergency and law enforcement services, trespassing, littering, etc.	37.45% 103	30.18% 83	20.73% 57	7.64% 21	2.55% 7	1.45% 4	275	4.88
Lack of living-wage employment opportunities in Big Sur.	2.49% 7	8.54% 24	9.25% 26	27.05% 76	28.83% 81	23.84% 67	281	2.57
Lack of/limited community services such as cell phone coverage, internet access, health and emergency services, etc., impacting resident and visitor well-being.	4.64% 13	3.57% 10	15.71% 44	18.57% 52	31.07% 87	26.43% 74	280	2.53
Resident access to Big Sur recreational activities being negatively impacted by visitor usage.	4.15% 12	6.23% 18	17.65% 51	20.42% 59	19.03% 55	32.53% 94	289	2.58

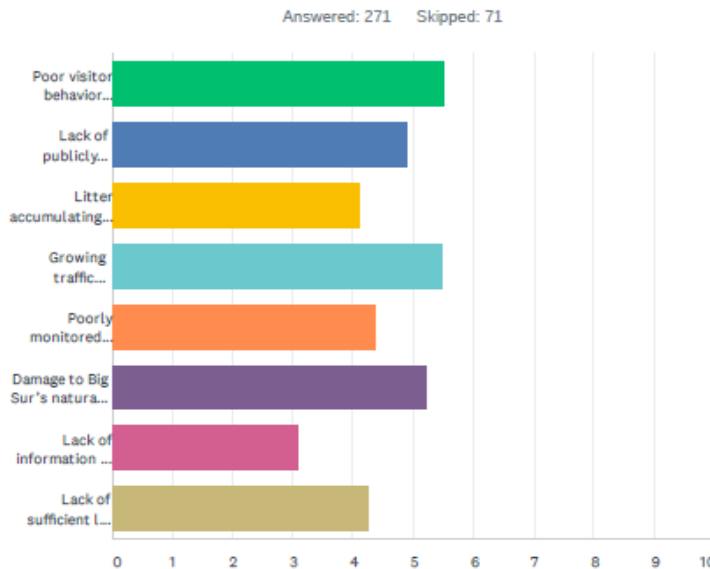
When asked about living and working in Big Sur, survey answers reflected both challenges that are exacerbated by tourism, as well as problems that affect residents’ lives beyond concerns about visitation. But the most important issues identified by residents are directly linked to visitation: poorly monitored and managed visitation causing safety hazards, and visitor traffic jams and unsafe

driving behavior, repeatedly came up as problems. The third most important issue - the lack of housing options in Big Sur - has impacts on tourism, including employees having to commute along Highway 1 to and from jobs in Big Sur, and difficulties for Big Sur employers in recruiting and retaining employees. This also causes other impacts to the community, given that Big Sur relies heavily on its own resources and volunteers, such as maintaining organizations like Big Sur Fire and the Mid-Coast Fire Brigade, the local health center, etc. This issue is more far-reaching than planning for visitation, and will require broader solutions, but aspects of visitation that directly impact community housing can and should be part of destination stewardship planning, as evidenced also in survey responses.

To further understand stakeholder concerns, the Resident Survey also included questions on what issues regarding visitation are of most importance to residents. The survey results further solidified the issues that had been brought forward during multi-stakeholder meetings and provided additional insights on issues of greatest concern.

Big Sur Sustainable Destination Stewardship Plan: Resident Survey

**Q13 Please rank the following tourism challenges facing Big Sur, from Most Serious (1) to Least Serious (8):**



Big Sur Sustainable Destination Stewardship Plan: Resident Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL	SCORE
Poor visitor behavior (trespassing, illegal parking, risky "selfies", etc.).	22.22% 54	14.81% 36	19.34% 47	14.81% 36	13.17% 32	4.12% 10	4.94% 12	6.58% 16	243	5.53
Lack of publicly accessible restrooms.	16.13% 40	16.94% 42	12.90% 32	9.68% 24	12.50% 31	12.90% 32	8.47% 21	10.48% 26	248	4.90
Litter accumulating in popular visitor areas and lack of trash collection.	2.89% 7	9.92% 24	11.16% 27	16.94% 41	17.77% 43	17.77% 43	16.94% 41	6.61% 16	242	4.09
Growing traffic congestion on Highway 1.	20.00% 49	17.96% 44	14.29% 35	14.69% 36	15.51% 38	8.98% 22	5.71% 14	2.86% 7	245	5.48
Poorly monitored back-country access and camping, resulting in increased fire risk.	10.48% 26	12.10% 30	12.50% 31	10.89% 27	14.52% 36	14.52% 36	12.10% 30	12.90% 32	248	4.37
Damage to Big Sur's natural environment from too many visitors.	23.08% 57	14.98% 37	11.74% 29	11.34% 28	9.72% 24	13.77% 34	11.34% 28	4.05% 10	247	5.23
Lack of information and guidelines to educate visitors about Big Sur (online information, interpretive signage, guidelines for responsible visitor behavior/driving, etc.).	3.56% 9	6.32% 16	7.91% 20	5.93% 15	10.28% 26	11.86% 30	27.67% 70	26.48% 67	253	3.08
Lack of sufficient law enforcement on Highway 1, especially at congested tourist sites (i.e. Bixby Bridge, McWay Falls, etc.).	9.89% 26	11.41% 30	14.45% 38	16.35% 43	5.70% 15	12.55% 33	8.75% 23	20.91% 55	263	4.26

For survey respondents, poor visitor behavior (trespassing, illegal parking, risky taking of “selfies”, etc.), is seen as the most important challenge, followed closely by growing traffic congestion on Highway 1, and damage to Big Sur’s natural environment. The issues of lack of publicly accessible restrooms, and the lack of enforcement on Highway 1, are close behind.

In short, issues of visitor management follow consistent themes that have been identified and acknowledged as problems for many years, and can be broadly categorized as follows: poor visitor behavior, lack of enforcement, lack of facilities to support visitation, and lack of funding to address the issues.

To gauge support for different visitor management ideas for Big Sur that can be implemented over both the short term, and move forward into the future with long term solutions, the Resident Survey asked respondents to indicate their support for a series of different solutions to address the identified issues.



Based on the resident survey, the same concerns and solutions reflected by participants in multi-stakeholder meetings carried out as part of the DSP process, were reflected in the survey responses:

More than 90% of survey respondents supported:

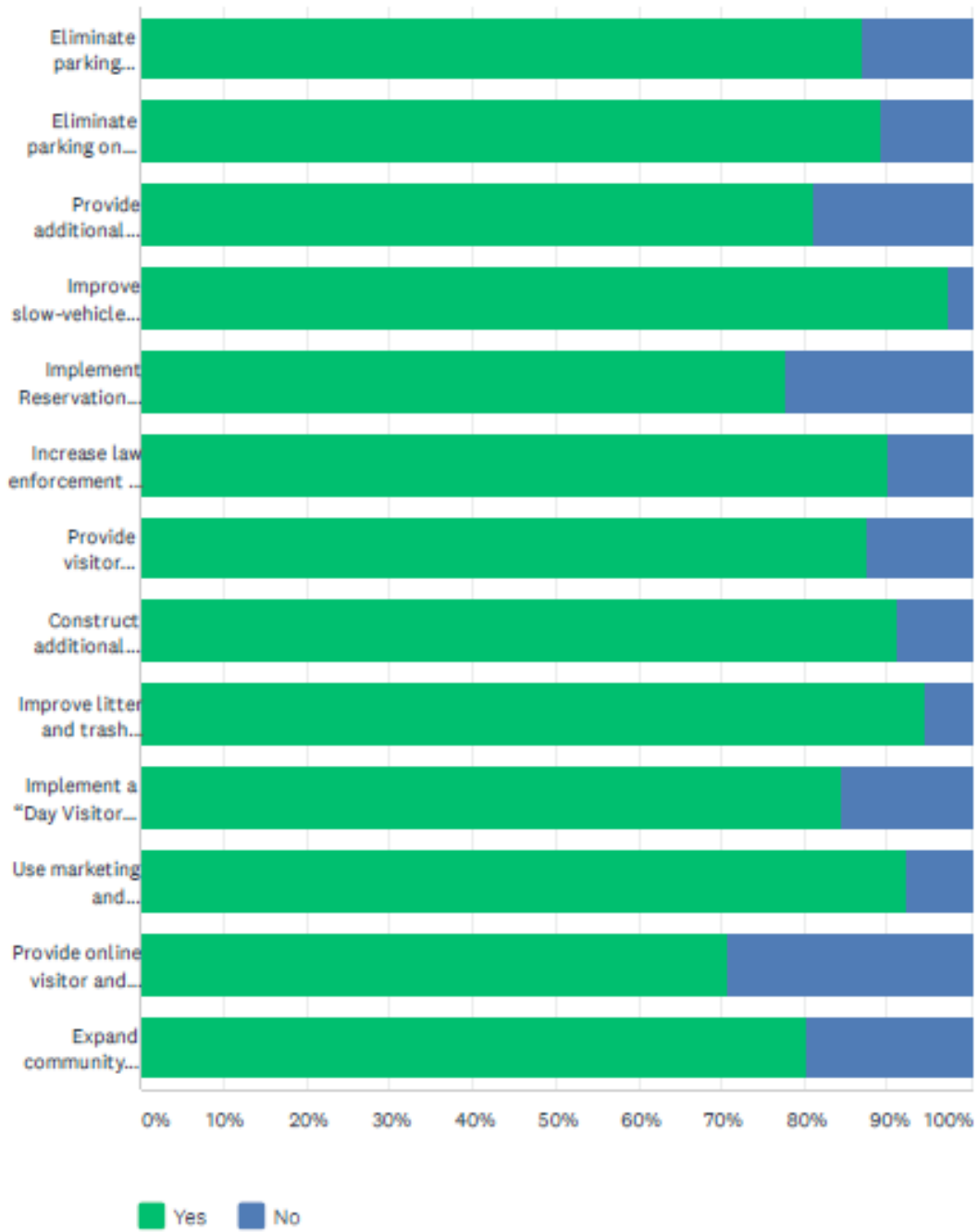
- Educating visitors about appropriate behavior and respectful interactions with Big Sur's environment, culture, and community;
- Improving slow vehicle turnouts;
- Improving litter and trash collection;
- Constructing additional public access restrooms.

More than 80% of survey respondents supported:

- Eliminating parking alongside Bixby Bridge and at McWay Falls;
- Providing visitor facilities at the north and south "entrances" to Big Sur;
- Implementing a Day Pass to provide funds to support visitor management.

These initial strategy ideas became the basis for the more detailed recommendations that are presented in this plan.

### Big Sur Sustainable Destination Stewardship Plan: Resident Survey

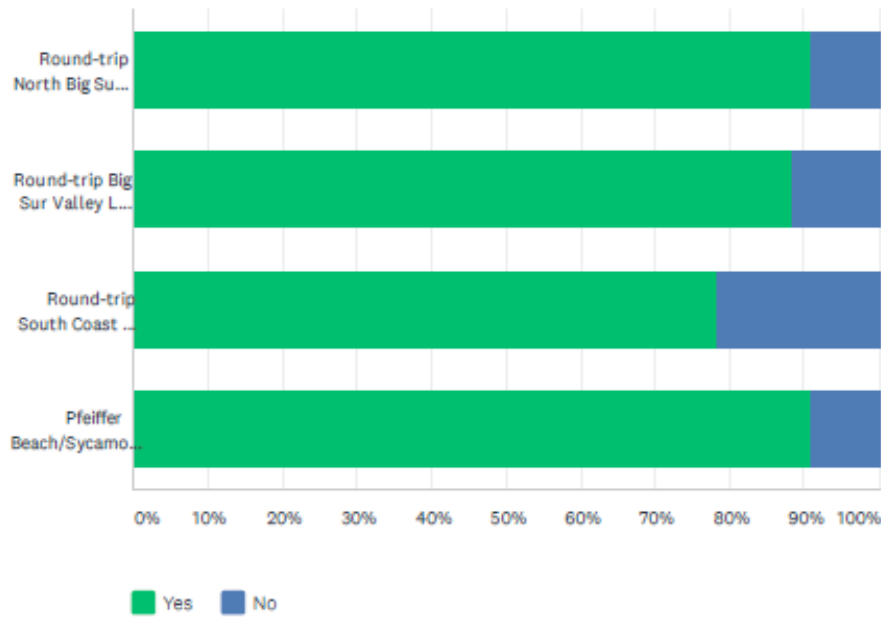


Big Sur Sustainable Destination Stewardship Plan: Resident Survey

	YES	NO	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Eliminate parking alongside Bixby Bridge and provide a designated look-out point that provides views of the bridge.	87.04% 215	12.96% 32	247	1.13
Eliminate parking on Highway 1 at McWay Falls and provide better management of parking access in designated areas.	89.20% 223	10.80% 27	250	1.11
Provide additional signage along Highway 1, co-locating whenever possible, to identify public restrooms, slow vehicle turnouts, and recreational opportunities.	80.88% 203	19.12% 48	251	1.19
Improve slow-vehicle turnout opportunities, including education and enforcement.	97.27% 249	2.73% 7	256	1.03
Implement Reservation Systems at highly visited destinations such as Pfeiffer Beach and for back-country access.	77.47% 196	22.53% 57	253	1.23
Increase law enforcement and ranger presence at popular tourism and camping locations to manage, monitor and improve safety and behavior.	90.04% 226	9.96% 25	251	1.10
Provide visitor facilities at the north and south entrance points to Big Sur to educate visitors and better manage visitation, including visitor behavior guidelines, day passes, shuttle services to popular sites, etc.	87.50% 217	12.50% 31	248	1.13
Construct additional public access restrooms in appropriate locations along Highway 1.	90.94% 231	9.06% 23	254	1.09
Improve litter and trash collection, including select placement and maintenance of trash receptacles along Highway 1.	94.40% 236	5.60% 14	250	1.06
Implement a "Day Visitor Green Pass" including State Park/USFS day pass, shuttle services, etc. to raise funds to support Big Sur infrastructure and community needs (e.g. emergency services, law enforcement, trash collection, restroom management, etc.).	84.43% 206	15.57% 38	244	1.16
Use marketing and communication services and information, both online and on site, to educate visitors about appropriate behavior and respectful interactions with Big Sur's environment, culture and community.	92.24% 226	7.76% 19	245	1.08
Provide online visitor and traffic information (using traffic webcams at select locations) to help manage visitor congestion.	70.68% 176	29.32% 73	249	1.29
Expand community housing options in Big Sur.	80.16% 198	19.84% 49	247	1.20

The survey additionally gauged whether there was support for the implementation of environmentally-friendly shuttle services in Big Sur as one solution to reducing traffic congestion on Highway 1. Shuttle services to Pfeiffer Beach and a Big Sur North Coast shuttle were both supported by over 90% of respondents, with a Big Sur Valley shuttle supported by 88% and a South Coast shuttle supported by 78% of respondents. These results should help to bolster efforts to move forward with implementation, despite obstacles such as funding and other short term challenges, knowing that community stakeholder support is strong.

### Q18 Would you support an environmentally-friendly shuttle service offering:



	YES	NO	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Round-trip North Big Sur shuttle service (Rio Road/Carmel Highlands to Big Sur Valley e.g. River Inn) with hop-on/hop-off opportunities along the way.	90.73% 225	9.27% 23	248	1.09
Round-trip Big Sur Valley Loop Shuttle with hop-on/hop-off opportunities along the way.	88.16% 216	11.84% 29	245	1.12
Round-trip South Coast Big Sur shuttle service with hop-on/hop-off opportunities along the way.	78.28% 191	21.72% 53	244	1.22
Pfeiffer Beach/Sycamore Canyon Road shuttle service.	90.76% 226	9.24% 23	249	1.09

With the rapid changes during 2020, impacting not only tourism but many aspects of daily life, planning visitation to Big Sur with the present and the future in mind is now more important than ever.

## **The Path Forward: DSP Recommendations**

These recommendations represent a culmination of Big Sur multi-stakeholder engagement meetings, interviews and surveys with Big Sur business owners, community members and residents, county, state, and federal officials, as well as local non-profit organizations and associations, all with a direct connection to Big Sur. A guiding principle throughout this process, as articulated in stakeholder meetings and as a key theme in all of the four documents referenced earlier, is the need to preserve and protect Big Sur. Protecting and preserving the natural environment is also a key element of destination stewardship and the following recommendations are focused on how to properly plan and manage visitation in Big Sur to minimize any negative impacts on the environment and to maximize protecting Big Sur's natural landscapes, biodiversity, and the overall environment. At the same time, destination stewardship also recognizes the importance of visitation to the economy and the local community, upon which many local businesses and jobs depend. From the outset, an important goal of the DSP has been to create strategies for visitor management with pragmatic recommendations and implementable action items that recognize the delicate balance of harnessing the economic benefits of visitation to support local livelihoods, while ensuring that Big Sur's natural environment remains protected and its community way of life also flourishes, now and in the future.

Given the unique aspects of Big Sur having multiple jurisdictions (private, non-profit, county, state and federal) as well as a wide range of opinions about visitation among stakeholders and community members, it is recognized that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing Big Sur's visitation challenges. With that in mind, the DSP represents a way forward based upon compromise to find enough common ground among stakeholders to support outcomes that advance the greater good of Big Sur.

The overriding purpose of these recommendations is to manage visitation with the goal of turning visitor impacts into positive impacts for Big Sur – its

environment, residents, community members and businesses, while reducing the negative consequences of unmanaged visitation. Speaking specifically to private businesses - it is noteworthy that several established businesses in Big Sur have been recognized nationally and internationally for their sustainability leadership. In keeping with destination stewardship, it is recommended that all businesses operating in Big Sur adopt and follow the principles of sustainable tourism best practices, guided by the three pillars previously mentioned, including sourcing locally as much as possible from within the community of Big Sur – including creative talent, cultural resources, business capabilities, and goods and services.

Another important guiding factor for the DSP process was to focus as much as possible on pragmatic solutions to visitation challenges, including both Short Term Actions (12-24 months) and Long Term Actions (3-5 years). With the unexpected arrival of the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic, leading to wide-scale economic hardship, including reports of California facing a daunting state budget deficit, it is anticipated that there will be even less funding available to help support Big Sur needs at the county, state, and federal levels. With that in mind, a more robust approach to out-of-the-box thinking on funding mechanisms that could help support the implementation of both short term and long term recommendations is also included.

Finally, while there is no “magic bullet” that will quickly or easily solve the inter-related visitation challenges facing Big Sur, there is plenty of room for progress and improvement to protect Big Sur’s natural environment and cultural heritage. Ensuring that a new and positive vision for destination stewardship takes root and prospers in Big Sur now and for years to come will also advance economic opportunity for local businesses, support job growth for the community, and allow for responsible visitor access.

The DSP Steering Committee, the community stakeholder group convened to help guide and shepherd this plan, can also provide guidance as the process moves to the next step of considering options for further discussion and implementation. It

is recommended that this group continue to be an available resource in the Big Sur community as the recommendations in the plan are further discussed, considered, and selected to move forward. The DSP Steering Committee can further help to ensure continued community engagement as implementation is considered, and the DSP Steering Committee can also serve as a mechanism for interfacing with the Byway Organization on DSP strategies.

The following recommendations are the priority challenges that were identified during the DSP multi-stakeholder consultation process; each is followed by short and long term action-oriented solutions, with different options to be further discussed for implementation.

**CHALLENGE: *Funding for Implementing Solutions***

Big Sur has many positive visitor management opportunities in its toolkit to help improve the impact of tourism on Big Sur and alleviate some of its negative consequences, including existing websites that provide information to visitors, volunteers who assist with monitoring the back country, and robust and ongoing efforts by engaged and active community members towards improving life in Big Sur for residents, from disaster relief to health care to emergency services, among others. Yet one issue has repeatedly risen to the forefront time and again in consultations with Big Sur stakeholders about ideas for improving visitation management: the challenge of funding resources to implement solutions. With different jurisdictions overseeing land use, visitation regulations, and other aspects of Big Sur that involve multiple levels of government agencies along with non-profit and volunteer organizations, businesses, private landowners, etc., funding for implementation of plans, and realizing ideas for improving visitation management in Big Sur have continued to face hurdles.

In the past few years, even before the coronavirus pandemic's impact on the economy, budgets have been shrinking, including at State Parks and on U.S. Forest Service lands, which have suffered from significant funding cuts. Coordination, collaboration, and cooperation between different agencies and

organizations about how to distribute funds or implement projects across multiple jurisdictions is an ongoing issue. There are institutional constraints to jointly engaging in many efforts, but there are also opportunities to re-visit and re-evaluate potential ways to move forward, particularly in light of the need for better inter-agency coordination as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which has led to new communication efforts and new engagement across different organizations and jurisdictions.

Challenges with funding resources have additionally been compounded by Big Sur being an unincorporated area within Monterey County, with no individual municipal status. Thus, there are no local tax revenues to provide services for residents, such as municipal trash collection and infrastructure repairs. Revenues that flow into Monterey County from Big Sur have many competing demands for their use across the five districts that make up the county, from Pajaro in the north to Salinas in the east to the San Luis Obispo County line in the south. Big Sur, as a part of District 5, competes for Monterey County funds to address a multitude of community needs.

As one resident, born and raised in Big Sur, explained,

*“My parent’s generation meant well when they fought against Big Sur being incorporated as a municipality before I was born, but they did not consider the long term consequences of that decision. As a result, we have to rely on volunteers for things like essential emergency services and we depend heavily on county and state funding to support our needs.”*

Revenue generated from sales taxes on items purchased or consumed in Big Sur goes to Monterey County and the State of California. Many residents feel that revenue generated through the marketing of Big Sur as a destination is not sufficiently invested back into Big Sur to protect and enhance its natural and cultural assets in commensurate measure, nor invested back into the community of Big Sur to properly mitigate some of the problems caused by visitation.



This is further compounded by the number of day visitors to Big Sur – the majority of visitors drive in and out of Big Sur on day trips, as also noted in the recently completed TDM. The visitor survey conducted as part of the TDM, although representing a small sampling of visitors, still provides valuable insights, including that 61% of visitors indicated that they were staying only for the day. 77% reported that they entered Big Sur from the north and were departing back the same way; 68% of respondents entering Big Sur from the south indicated that they were departing back the same way. (Caltrans, 2020) Such day visitors contribute in a more limited way to the economic resources of Big Sur. For example, they do not pay the Transient Occupancy Tax, which is levied on overnight visitors - a source of county revenue that could be further earmarked and invested back to specifically assist Big Sur. Yet, the consequences of day use visitation contribute significantly to tourism management concerns, particularly in relation to the natural environment of Big Sur.

With the negative impacts of the global coronavirus pandemic across all sectors of the economy and, in particular, hospitality and restaurant services, funding at all levels - county, state, federal - will be much more limited. Thus, innovative and creative strategies will need to be employed to secure funding for the implementation of recommendations and actions in this plan to improve visitor management in Big Sur.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 months)**

#### ***Action: Establish a “Go Green” Day Pass to Generate Revenue***

The creation of a “Go Green” Day Pass for visitors to purchase online before arriving or once in Big Sur, will enable visitors to give back in positive ways to the protection and preservation of Big Sur, as well as to support community needs. The purchase of this day pass would contribute funds for providing better visitor management services, improving the experience for both visitors and residents, and enabling a source of funds to come directly into the Big Sur community in the

form of a Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” (see below) for the specific purpose of helping to solve some of the long-standing visitation issues that have led to increasing friction with the community.

Specifically identifying the purpose of the “Go Green” Day Pass – to protect Big Sur’s iconic natural heritage through support for local environmental conservation organizations, as well as providing enhanced visitor services (trash receptacles/litter collection, improved restroom access, etc.) will help to ensure that together, Big Sur visitors and residents alike work to preserve this beautiful coastline. This also provides a compelling story that allows Big Sur to promote sustainable tourism destination leadership at a time when this is of increasing importance to domestic and international travelers, as evidenced in recent travel industry research on how tourism will change in a post-pandemic world.

Tourist day passes (and multi-day passes) have been used for various purposes in other places. In California, the *Go California* pass, and the *Go San Francisco* pass are two examples of visitor passes that allow travelers to use public transit and/or to pick and choose attractions to visit over a period of time. (San Francisco Travel Association, 2019) Hawaii offers visitor passes for Oahu and Maui, and destinations in other parts of the world, from cities like Singapore to entire countries like Holland, offer versions of visitor passes that include transportation and attractions as a way to enhance the visitor experience and also raise revenue to support national, state, and municipal services.

However, specifically tailoring a visitor day pass to focus on enhancing the care and protection of the place being visited and as a way to support the local community, is a relatively new idea; although it is already gaining further traction based upon conservation fees and community development fees in some tourism destinations. Big Sur has the opportunity to show that it is at the forefront of destination stewardship, where visitors have a positive way to help give back to protecting Big Sur’s environment, support local businesses, and benefit the community. Implementing a Big Sur “Go Green” Day Pass under the auspices of a

community-supported and designated non-profit organization in Big Sur would provide the Big Sur community with a source of funding for managing visitation and addressing community needs that is not dependent on funding from governmental entities.

**Option 1:** Offer a “Go Green” Day Pass for purchase online through multiple Big Sur channels – CABS, MCCVB, Big Sur Chamber of Commerce, etc., as well as through area businesses, including potential partners in Monterey County (such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium) and in San Luis Obispo County. The suggested amount for the “Go Green” Day Pass would be \$10 per vehicle. It would include other visitor benefits as incentives for the purchase of the pass, such as special discounts (for example, 10% or 20% off) at participating Big Sur businesses, restaurants, shops, and galleries. Big Sur shuttle services (see below) could also be included for free for those who purchase a “Go Green” Day Pass, once shuttle services are established.

Multi-day “Go Green” Day Pass options could also be offered, such as \$18 for a two-day pass, or \$25 for a three-day pass. Places that sell the “Go Green” Day Pass could also be offered a 20% commission as an incentive for promoting and selling the pass, either as an add-on to the price, or by reducing the amount submitted to the entity managing the “Go Green” pass program. The pass could be sold both through a “Go Green” Big Sur website and an app, which could feature visitor education information and maps. It could also be sold through various existing Big Sur websites, either directly or via a link to the “Go Green” website. Given the limited cellphone and Wi-Fi signal service available in Big Sur, when purchasing a “Go Green” pass, visitors can be advised to print out the pass or take a screen shot of it (much like an airline boarding pass).

**Option 2:** A combined Big Sur “Go Green” Day Pass with day use access passes valid for State Parks and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Parks Management Company (PMC)\*

\*Some USFS/PMC parks and recreational areas charge only a parking fee, which allows for day use

This combined pass would entail coordination and collaboration with the State Parks and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and its current management concessionaire, Parks Management Company (PMC). While the USFS and PMC do not currently offer a single day use pass option that allows visitors to access all of their day use areas along the Big Sur coast for one single daily fee, this is a potential area for discussion and collaboration which could be a win-win by providing an incentive for visitors to purchase the Go Green Day Pass while also improving the visitor experience when traveling along the Big Sur Coast and visiting various parks. This combined “Go Green” Day Pass would also include free access to all Big Sur shuttle services.

The “Go Green” Day Pass revenue could help support improved services such as restrooms and trash facilities, while providing consistency and eliminating confusion around park restroom access: State Parks allow visitors to come in for the sole purpose of using restrooms without having to pay the day use fee. USFS/PMC entities do not allow restroom access without paying, and visitors have difficulty navigating these confusing rules when it comes to what public restrooms they can use. Multi-day combined “Go Green” passes could also be offered, which would appeal to guests staying at local hotels and private campgrounds in Big Sur who have more time to explore the area.

In addition to Options 1 and 2 for visitors, a Resident “Go Green” Annual Pass should also be considered. A Resident “Go Green” Annual Pass could combine a State Parks Annual Pass, a USFS Adventure Pass, and a PMC Annual Pass. Currently, USFS in Monterey District does not offer the annual USFS Adventure Pass in Big Sur, although it is offered in other areas of Los Padres National Forest, and it is recommended that this annual Adventure Pass also be offered in Big Sur.

Through this “Go Green” Annual Pass, residents would contribute funds that directly benefit Big Sur, while also gaining year-round access to Big Sur State Parks and USFS/PMC day use recreational areas. As with the other “Go Green” Pass options, any parking reservations systems implemented at Pfeiffer Beach or

McWay Falls would be separate from this annual pass. To qualify for a Resident “Go Green” Annual Pass, proof of residency in Monterey County would be required.

“Go Green” pass funds could be collected through a local existing Big Sur NGO, or through the Community Foundation for Monterey County, with a decision to be determined by the Big Sur community, and with funds dispersed to the State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, and Parks Management Company via Cooperating Association Agreements or similar, if a combined pass option is offered.

A good example of a Cooperating Association Agreement is the existing relationship between the Point Lobos Foundation and the Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, a successful partnership agreement that has benefitted visitors, residents, and the park itself. Examples also exist of Cooperating Association Agreements with multiple parks, such as Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks. These are models to consider and build on when determining the best way to implement a “Go Green” pass system that includes access to State and USFS public lands.

***Action: Establish a Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” to Finance Solutions***

The “Go Green” Day Pass could result in significant funding specifically earmarked to benefit Big Sur. For example, even if just 100,000 cars out of the estimated millions of visitor cars that drive Highway 1 in Big Sur annually were to purchase the \$10 “Go Green” Day Pass, that would immediately generate upwards of \$1 million each year for a Big Sur “Sustainability Fund.” With ample promotion of the “Go Green” Day Pass, such revenue could potentially accrue several million dollars annually.

Such funds should be managed through one of the multiple non-profit groups that currently operate in Big Sur, or perhaps through the Community Foundation for Monterey County, with oversight and clear guidance from the Big Sur community. The specific purpose of a Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” would be to

support the implementation of DSP recommendations related to improving visitor management, support for local conservation initiatives, as well as ongoing community development needs (i.e. local infrastructure improvements, emergency services, etc.). Specific criteria and guidelines for how to distribute or allocate the funds should be determined by local community stakeholders, with a transparent and well-managed process.

***Action: Establish a Big Sur “Community Corps” to Help Implement Solutions***

A Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” can be used to set up and fund a Big Sur “Community Corps” - a source of paid members and/or volunteers to support the visitor management strategies noted in the DSP recommendations. It is recognized that the Big Sur community has a wealth of organizations that provide volunteer services to Big Sur – from Big Sur Fire and the Mid-Coast Fire Brigade to the Big Sur Community Emergency Response Team, from the Community Association of Big Sur to the Big Sur Historical Society, and from the Ventana Wilderness Alliance to Big Sur Advocates for a Green Environment, among others.

Designating a “Community Corps” to specifically address visitation management can bring an important additional resource to Big Sur, including paid staff to support employment opportunities for local residents while serving to provide visitors with important information on Big Sur, as well as monitoring of high visitation impact areas to promote positive visitor behavior.

“Community Corps” members could be stationed at visitation “hotspots” to guide visitor behavior, provide information and education, monitor and collect information about issues over time to help better manage visitor impacts. Big Sur “Community Corps” members could also be involved in back country monitoring, in support and enhancement of existing volunteer efforts there, or be stationed at popular trail heads and entrances to dispersed camping areas to provide information and education. There are successful precedents for similar initiatives utilizing volunteers and part-time paid community members both as ambassadors of their community to visitors and providing information to assist and educate

visitors to “do the right thing.” For example, the volunteer “Docents” at nearby Point Lobos State Natural Reserve and the volunteers at the Point Sur Lighthouse are two highly regarded local efforts. Providing additional guidance, instruction, education, and information to visitors will help to alleviate some of the concerns with visitation, while also enabling community members to have direct involvement and engagement in improving and managing the visitor experience for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

A basic training program should be developed for all “Community Corps” members, ensuring a consistent knowledge base, understanding of Big Sur’s sustainability ethos, and the ability to communicate positively and effectively with the public. Members should be able to provide information about the history, natural heritage, cultural resources, and communities of Big Sur, as well as providing details about where and how to find restrooms, trash receptacles, the “do’s and don’ts” of respectful visitor behavior, and an understanding of public health and safety, local traffic rules and laws, etc. Utilizing existing community resources to design and develop the training would ensure that it reflects and values the perspectives and knowledge of the Big Sur community. The training could be offered as a combination of online and in-person sessions.

Again, local examples of such efforts include the training for Docents who serve at Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, and the volunteers who work at Point Sur, as well as the training carried out for back country ranger volunteers offered by the Ventana Wilderness Alliance, training for the Big Sur Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), and other local volunteer efforts that have a wealth of information and knowledge that could help to ensure that Community Corps members interacting with the visiting public are knowledgeable, effective, aware of available community resources, etc.

Joint Powers Agreements with the appropriate law enforcement agencies could be considered to allow “Community Corps” members to issue citations or assist with law enforcement around particular visitation management issues, but this

undertaking would require careful deliberation to determine if this is the right strategy for utilizing “Community Corps” members. In other popular nature travel destinations (such as the small country of Belize), successful community Co-Management Agreements (the equivalent of Joint Powers Agreements in the USA) with local and national authorities have been put into effect, allowing trained community members to monitor and enforce visitor behavior in recreational areas, including parks and reserves.

***Action: Explore Other Funding Avenues***

Other opportunities for funding Big Sur sustainable tourism initiatives should also be explored. Grant funding opportunities for specific projects that address tourism visitation issues may be one source of additional resources. Streamlining the granting of permissions and permits for commercial filming in Big Sur to include a defined percentage contribution to the Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” could also be considered as a source for additional funds. This would guarantee a source of revenue beyond inconsistent “volunteer” donations to different Big Sur organizations from companies that use Big Sur in advertising, films, TV shows or to define their products (i.e. Apple’s macOS “*Big Sur*” desktop operating system, introduced in 2020). In turn, those funds could be used to directly support enhanced services that would benefit residents. Another idea put forward by Big Sur stakeholders is to earmark a specific percentage (10%) of the Transient Occupancy Tax generated by Big Sur businesses for Monterey County for the Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” as a way to ensure that Big Sur community and visitation management issues can be addressed.

**CHALLENGE: Accurate Visitor Management Data**

An important part of any destination stewardship plan is having data available to make sound, fact-based decisions. Because Big Sur is an unincorporated coastal Monterey County community, data specific to Big Sur, in terms of traffic, visitor numbers, overnight stays, etc., is difficult to access easily, and contributes to some of the challenges of managing Big Sur’s tourism and visitation for the future.



Among community stakeholders, perceptions range, pre-coronavirus pandemic, from a decrease in tourism, to being swamped by tourists and in danger of “overtourism.” Among many in Big Sur, there is a feeling that peak visitation, which used to be confined to the summer months, now stretches throughout the year. Estimates of visitors to Big Sur range from 4.6 million vehicle trips per year to 7 million visitors, with various estimates in between. Whatever the actual number, Big Sur stakeholders have made clear that traffic, and the visitors in many of those vehicles, are having a significant impact on the local way of life and Big Sur’s natural environment.

Local efforts, such as the placement of traffic counters on three South Coast roads with access to dispersed camping sites, which began in January 2020, have already provided valuable data that enabled the USFS to make informed decisions about closing access to dispersed camping areas and Forest Service roads to visitors during the coronavirus pandemic Shelter-In-Place orders, when the vehicle counters were able to show increased traffic on those roads.

Establishing good data collection protocols that will enable evaluation of the effectiveness of visitor management strategies, and provide accurate information on which to base decisions, is critically important to managing visitation in Big Sur. Good data allows for modifications and adaptations to visitor management strategies and can provide critical information when seeking funding support from both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Knowing what is really happening and being able to look at patterns accurately over time will allow for the assessment of the effectiveness of implemented strategies.

Important components of destination stewardship include not only data to accurately understand visitor numbers and their important economic contribution to the local economy (where are visitors from, how long do they stay, how much do they spend, etc.), but data is also needed to understand the impacts of tourism on the community. Implementing a regular process of data collection allows for seeing trends over time, and for adjusting strategies based on new information.

As Big Sur emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, there is an opportunity to implement data collection systems now that can be used moving forward as the tourism economy recovers, to make informed ongoing decisions that may affect visitation management in the future.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short term (12-24 months)**

#### ***Action: Implement Visitor Count Data Collection***

Identify mechanisms to regularly evaluate the number and types of visitors to Big Sur – utilizing State Park visitation numbers, USFS/PMC visitation numbers, Transit Occupancy Tax receipts, etc. An accurate understanding of where visitors are coming from (international, national, regional, local), how long they stay (day visitors, overnight, or multi-night stays), and their activities, will provide information to help Big Sur implement appropriate approaches to visitation. An annual analysis of this information will help to inform decisions and prioritize visitor management strategies based on reliable information.

#### ***Action: Establish an Annual Traffic Count***

Accurate long term permanent traffic counting for at least three locations in Big Sur should begin as soon as possible. The TDM recommends three permanent count locations, two of them in the BSLUP area - north of Garrapata State Park, and at the Monterey County/San Luis Obispo county line. A long term permanent traffic counting mechanism should also be implemented in Big Sur Valley. In addition to counting vehicular traffic, the counts should also include bicycles, given the popularity and growing interest in bicycling along Big Sur's coast. Combining efforts with Caltrans to implement this recommendation, and garnering the support of BSMAAC participants, will strengthen the data that can be collected for Big Sur.

***Action: Establish a Process of Visitor and Resident Surveys***

Particularly in light of the changing economic and visitation patterns as a result of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, it is recommended that a system be implemented to collect information on changing visitor perceptions about Big Sur, and changing resident sentiment about visitation in Big Sur. It is suggested that this be conducted annually, potentially as a collaboration between CABS and the MCCVB.

The TDM plan conducted a small visitor survey based on postcards placed on windshields of parked cars along the Big Sur Highway 1 corridor during the summer of 2019. The DSP process included a resident survey, conducted online in February-March 2020. Both efforts can be expanded to monitor changes, adjust strategies, and gather valuable information related to visitor and resident perceptions and feedback that can help inform future destination stewardship decision-making. The Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” may be one source of support for such efforts, in combination with other funding resources.

**Long term (3-5 years)**

***Action: Compile a Comprehensive Annual Data Summary***

Develop a process for evaluating and compiling all data relevant to visitation in Big Sur annually, to ensure that strategies for management are being evaluated and adjusted over time to address and further minimize any negative impacts from tourism on Big Sur’s environment, culture, and community. This Data Summary should be shared with BSMAAC members, ensuring that county, state and federal political representatives and agencies are informed, as well as the non-profits, business groups, and community stakeholders who are interested in and impacted by this Big Sur data and information.

In addition to the specific data mentioned above, other sources of information and data to monitor over the long term include changes in state laws, regulations and policies as they relate to tourism and their impacts; law enforcement

citations, tickets, fines, or violations; health and safety issues, emergency services calls, and other specific incidents such as disasters (fire, landslides, health issues, etc.) that impact tourism and visitation.

### **CHALLENGE: Visitor Traffic Management**

With Highway 1 as the main corridor for access to Big Sur for residents, employees, and visitors alike, addressing concerns about traffic, congestion, pedestrian behavior, safety, and enforcement are critical to improving visitation management. Traffic congestion on Highway 1 has many intertwined effects on the visitor experience, and on the livelihoods of those who live and work in Big Sur, impacting the protection of the natural environment as well as the health and safety of all who travel the roadway - from visitors to residents to law enforcement personnel to emergency responders. Congestion “hotspots” create frustration as well as safety issues - Soberanes Point, Garrapata Beach, Bixby Bridge, Pfeiffer Beach, McWay Falls, Partington Cove, among others, are consistently top visitor attractions, and create chokepoints along Highway 1 that heavily impact moving up and down the highway corridor during certain times. Those areas also create issues with pedestrian behavior, as people dash across roads unexpectedly or walk along narrow roadsides, without regard for traffic that may be moving quickly or unable to see them well, such as at blind turns.

The roadway itself is governed by various regulations as a scenic highway that also limit physical infrastructure solutions. Other restrictions to protect the critical viewshed that are contained in the BSLUP and the California Coastal Act mean that any infrastructure improvements that are not driven by emergency situations (landslides, flooding, etc.) can and have taken years to be considered and implemented. In addition, the multiple agencies that must interact along the roadway to provide enforcement mean managing coordination, along with different laws, rules, and protocols. Depending on location and circumstances, a situation along the highway that requires enforcement intervention may require California Highway Patrol, the Monterey County Sheriff’s Department, California State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, as well as emergency services such as CalFire or

volunteer Big Sur Fire or Mid Coast Fire Brigade, depending on location and circumstances. Again, the coronavirus pandemic has provided opportunities to build better communication and coordination among agencies, and these efforts can be further strengthened to help address visitation challenges.

In the meantime, improving the experience of using Highway 1 for both visitors and residents is both essential and possible.

Among other specific recommendations for addressing issues associated with Highway 1 traffic management, visitor information and education to help ameliorate problem visitor behavior is a critical component. Providing additional information about opportunities for accessing walking or hiking on a day use basis, additional placement of amenities such as trash receptacles and access to restrooms, will all help to better distribute visitors through the corridor, providing recreational access while mitigating community concerns about protecting natural resources and improving safety. In addition, providing better information about opportunities for recreational activities such as walking and hiking may also help to encourage day visitors that are more oriented to enjoying and protecting the natural heritage that Big Sur represents, and less interested in the “selfie” photo-snapping at a limited number of “hotspot” locations that leads to some of the traffic and safety problems along Highway 1.

For visitors, information about traveling on Highway 1 should be provided both prior to arrival, and reinforced onsite, to provide people with real-time reminders of what is safe and legal behavior and what is not.

The TDM, completed by Caltrans in February 2020, provides additional recommendations for improving the Highway 1 visitor experience, particularly regarding infrastructure improvements along the Highway that are in keeping with the CHMP. As noted above, the TDM recommended the formation of the Byway Organization originally proposed as part of the CHMP, and Monterey County has moved forward with its establishment, with administrative support

provided by MCCVB. Once the Byway Organization is fully formed and begins meeting, the opportunity to look at ways to better manage traffic on Highway 1 through technology, infrastructure, visitor education, etc. will be important components of managing traffic on the highway.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 months)**

#### ***Action: Increase Monitoring and Enforcement during Peak Holiday Periods at Key Visitation “Hotspots”***

During the coronavirus pandemic, existing Mutual Aid agreements between law enforcement agencies were important to enforcing Shelter-In-Place ordinances, including closure of beaches and State Parks, closure of USFS Forest Roads and LPNF recreation areas, etc. These agreements helped the community of Big Sur to respond more effectively to concerning visitor behavior, from entering State Parks and USFS lands that were closed, to ignoring social-distancing mandates, to ignoring beach and facility closures. Increased issuing of fines, volunteers informing visitors of new rules and regulations, etc. helped reduce some of these encroachments and behavior. While these agreements are always in place, their visibility and need have been reinforced by the Shelter-In-Place and changing re-opening directives of the coronavirus pandemic. They represent a framework to strengthen, build upon and enhance in terms of some of the visitation problems identified by Big Sur residents and stakeholders, to increase the ability of law enforcement entities, with support, to deal more effectively with challenges in the corridor, particularly at “hotspots.”

It is worth noting that Big Sur residents observed that, during changing Shelter-in-Place and re-opening rules, and despite overall reduced visitation and traffic during the coronavirus pandemic, popular areas in Big Sur continued to face visitation issues and illegal activities, from ignoring closures of dispersed camping and day use areas, to traffic congestion along Highway 1, to vehicle moving and parking violations at Bixby Bridge. The need for more eyes and boots on the

ground, and the ability to better enforce existing laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations are all critical to improving these visitation challenges. Utilizing “Community Corps” members stationed at visitor “hotspots” to assist with better educating visitors in Big Sur can be part of improved monitoring to ameliorate some of the negative impacts and promote positive visitor behavior.

In the Big Sur Resident Survey, improving slow vehicle turnout opportunities, including education and enforcement, was listed as one of the most important visitor management priorities among respondents. Slow vehicle turnouts along Highway 1 allow opportunities for vehicles traveling at slow speeds to pull over and let other vehicles pass, facilitating a smoother flow of traffic through the corridor. With much of the corridor posted at 55 mph speed limit, except through Big Sur Valley, where the posted speed limit is 45 mph, there are a number of paved, signed slow vehicle turnouts along Highway 1 in Big Sur, as well as numerous unpaved and unsigned pull-over areas that are not specifically designated as slow vehicle turnouts, but are used as such.

The TDM also addressed the issue of slow vehicle turnouts, suggesting that turnouts be established at regular intervals (five miles was the suggested distance between turnouts) to improve the driving and transit experience through the corridor. (Caltrans, 2020) In addition, the TDM addressed the issue of geometric improvements to road configuration at points of concern, such as Sycamore Canyon Road. Providing left-hand turns at critical junctions, such as south-bound at Palo Colorado Road, north-bound at Sycamore Canyon Road, among others, have also been brought forward by Big Sur stakeholders as areas of concern in terms of addressing unsafe driving conditions. These should be given strong consideration to address as part of the TDM, along with establishing no parking zones at particularly dangerous pull-out areas. But given that infrastructure improvements and changes in regulations can be costly and can take a long time to be implemented, short term actions to improve traffic flow are also needed.

California Vehicle Code Section 21656 states:

“On a two-lane highway where passing is unsafe because of traffic in the opposite direction or other conditions, any vehicle proceeding upon the highway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction at that time, behind which five or more vehicles are formed in line, shall turn off the roadway at the nearest place designated as a turnout by signs erected by the authority having jurisdiction over the highway, or wherever sufficient area for a safe turnout exists, in order to permit the vehicles following it to proceed.” (California State Legislature, n.d.)

Educating visitors about this law, through various avenues of visitor education before arrival, and on site via “Community Corps” members providing information, along with more consistent enforcement of those not in compliance, particularly during peak visitation periods, are two methods for improving the traffic congestion situation, while advocating for improvements in signage and infrastructure that may require a longer timeframe to implement.

Additionally, further reducing the speed limit through congested areas such as the Big Sur Valley or when approaching areas of high visitation such as Soberanes, Garrapata Beach, Bixby Bridge, McWay Falls, etc. may also help traffic to move more safely through the Highway 1 corridor. Dynamic Message Signs with rotating messages at the north and south entrances to Big Sur could also be used to remind drivers of reduced speed limits at identified areas that are “hotspots,” particularly during peak visitation times.

Another significant monitoring and enforcement concern is that of illegal overnight parking and camping along Highway 1 - illegal campfires, dumping of trash, and piles of human waste are often the all-too-visible results. Big Sur residents conducted volunteer monitoring over the 2020 Fourth of July weekend to determine the extent of illegal overnight parking and camping along Highway 1 and were startled by the extent of the illegal activity they witnessed. Over the following weekend, July 11-12, volunteers counted 212 car, truck, trailer, van, and RV campers parked overnight along Highway 1 in Big Sur from Mal Paso Creek to the Monterey/San Luis Obispo County line.



Continuing to advocate for additional enforcement should be a priority, even as education about proper visitor behavior and the laws, ordinances, and rules of transiting Big Sur are strengthened through visitor education efforts, including the “Community Corps.” Providing increased law enforcement presence along Highway 1 to promote improved adherence to existing laws would help alleviate traffic congestion, decrease unlawful behavior, and improve the travel experience, as well as the safety of the highway.

***Action: Investigate and Evaluate Opportunities for Implementing Adaptive Traffic Management on Highway 1 to Improve Traffic Flow and Safety***

Concerns about traffic congestion and safety have been raised for many years in Big Sur, beginning when Highway 1 first opened in 1937, when it was noted that the roadway quickly experienced 60% higher traffic than was expected. In 1986 the BSLUP stated in Section 4.1, “The very characteristics that make Highway 1 such an interesting driving experience also create traffic safety problems, particularly during congested periods.” (County of Monterey, 1986). The Key Policy in Section 4.1.1 states, “In order to protect and enhance public recreational enjoyment of Big Sur’s unique natural and scenic resources, recreational traffic should be regulated during congested peak use periods.” (County of Monterey, 1986) And while the BSLUP does not call for restricting vehicle access to Big Sur, it does note that “if traffic continues to increase causing unacceptable Highway 1 service loads, then the flow of traffic into Big Sur should be regulated by devices such as signal lights.” (BSLUP, Section 4.2.4.c) In 2020, the TDM noted that “parking quickly reaches capacity, initiating a sequence of events that leads to significant congestion, operational issues, and maintenance concerns.” (Caltrans, 2020)

There have been many technological advances in systems that can adapt traffic flow to help ease congestion problems and enhance safety on busy roadways. Thinking more outside-of-the-box, two ideas to address traffic issues on Highway 1 that have been dismissed in the past as “impossible” to implement due to State laws and different agency jurisdictions, may now represent a possibility for reconsideration through the establishment of the Byway Organization:

- Establish timed access to Highway 1 for slow moving vehicles, allowing them to enter the highway only during certain hours to help streamline the flow of traffic during peak visitor driving hours through the corridor.
- Implement a metered entrance to Big Sur for all vehicles to allow only a maximum number of vehicles to enter Big Sur during certain times, based on the concept of “ramp metering” that has been implemented on other California highways (residents of Monterey County and emergency services/law enforcement vehicles would be exempt).

As technology further develops, other opportunities may also become available for consideration as California and Big Sur re-imagine tourism in the post-pandemic period.

### **Shuttle Services**

Shuttle services can be another important way to rethink the Big Sur visitor experience and its attractions and help to reduce visitor vehicle traffic along Highway 1 in Big Sur. Respondents to the Big Sur Resident Survey expressed particularly strong support for the implementation of shuttle services in Big Sur to encourage visitors to use alternative transportation for accessing Big Sur’s attractions. Existing data, while it is not conclusive nor comprehensive, indicates that most visitors to Big Sur are day visitors, and most of those visitors drive into Big Sur and then turn around and drive back to their entry point. The majority of those visitors enter Big Sur from the north, turning around near Nepenthe. Fewer visitors enter from the south, but they generally also turn around and return the same way. Even fewer visitors drive all the way through Big Sur from either direction.

While there is an existing public bus route that serves Big Sur (MST 22), which runs from Carmel-by-the-Sea to Nepenthe, this bus service has low ridership, the schedule is infrequent, and it changes seasonally. As noted in the TDM, “the bus

schedules are generally inconvenient for commuters and for recreational visitors who wish to visit multiple recreation areas for short periods throughout the course of the day.” (Caltrans, 2020) This bus system is not designed with a hop-on, hop-off schedule to enable recreational visitors to utilize it for a day trip to Big Sur. Thus, shuttle services explicitly designed for visitors can better encourage use of alternative transportation options to replace self-driving in a private vehicle. The TDM also recommended the implementation of shuttle services, including at Pfeiffer Beach, and in the Big Sur Valley. (Caltrans, 2020)

Big Sur’s shuttles should be environmentally-friendly and powered by clean energy to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change impacts, and there are a variety of options that can be considered, including electric hybrids, biodiesel, and compressed natural gas. Clean fuel vehicles have a number of properties that make them more attractive than conventional vehicles. They have lower tailpipe emissions of air pollutants like carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxide (NOx), sodium oxide (SOx) and fine particles, and provide higher fuel economy (MWCG, 2020). The size of Big Sur’s shuttles should be small, carrying approximately 25-35 passengers each. In the case of Pfeiffer Beach, the shuttle size should be limited to carrying 10-15 passengers for ease of traveling up and down Sycamore Canyon Road.

To further encourage participation, purchasers of the “Go Green” Day Pass could be offered free access to the Big Sur shuttles, once and if such shuttle services are established, as presented in this plan. There are several options for consideration related to the implementation of shuttle services that can happen simultaneously or in a staged roll out.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 months)**

#### ***Action: Re-institute Sycamore Canyon Road/Pfeiffer Beach Shuttle***

The Big Sur Land Use Plan (Section 4.2.3) states that a Pfeiffer Beach shuttle should be considered. In 2018, a successful pilot shuttle program was implemented by Big Sur resident Weston Call to help address the issues of traffic congestion and safety for both residents and visitors alike along Sycamore Canyon Road, the access route for Pfeiffer Beach. The shuttle successfully operated from May to September 2018 between Big Sur Station and Pfeiffer Beach. Parking at Big Sur Station cost \$10/vehicle, and riders of the shuttle paid \$5/person for the shuttle service. In addition to the ride itself, the shuttle was an opportunity for visitor education and information to be shared enroute. Weston's untimely death in August 2018 led to the end of the shuttle service after completing its first successful season in September of that year. Attempts to revive the shuttle service in 2019 were unsuccessful, due to concerns about operating costs and Coastal Commission concerns that it would limit access to the beach. However, there was widespread support, multi-agency stakeholder engagement, and positive reviews of the service when it was operating. The DSP recommends that a shuttle be re-instituted to better manage the movement of people and to reduce traffic congestion on Sycamore Canyon Road.

"Go Green" Day Pass funds, through the Big Sur "Sustainability Fund," could be used to support the shuttle service, and "Go Green" Day Pass purchasers could be offered the shuttle service for free, while others would be required to pay a fee to use the service. California companies interested in promoting the protection of California's iconic natural heritage, while allowing responsible access for residents and visitors alike, may also be willing to help support the shuttle service or contribute to it in exchange for their name on the bus. For example, outdoor nature recreation company L.L. Bean pays for a clean energy shuttle that serves Acadia National Park and the surrounding local communities on Mt. Desert Island in Maine, with their name displayed on the bus as a way to show their support for

the community and visitors to Maine’s most popular tourism attraction.

The Pfeiffer Beach shuttle service could be offered in coordination with a North Coast shuttle service connecting at Big Sur Station. Offering an online reservation system (similar to the locally-based airport shuttle, Monterey Airbus) for the shuttle service from Big Sur Station and Pfeiffer Beach could also help to manage visitor flow, with staggered shuttle times. This will provide a clear sense of visitor use patterns for the operation of the shuttle and will be particularly important for establishing and staggering the shuttle schedule during high-visitation hours at Pfeiffer Beach to reduce crowding.

The implementation of a parking reservation system at Pfeiffer Beach (see below), in conjunction with the shuttle service, would help manage access to the beach and provide an alternative to the number of visitor vehicles traveling up and down Sycamore Canyon Road. A parking and reservation system implemented at California’s Muir Woods National Monument in 2018 has led to improved visitation management, and has seen positive impacts from reduced traffic, reduced erosion and other environmental damage from illegal parking, as well as reductions in overcrowding at Muir Woods (see below for additional information).

Big Sur residents could be offered a free or reduced rate for riding the Pfeiffer Beach Shuttle, in addition to having shuttle access included in the purchase of a Resident “Go Green” Annual Pass.

### **Long Term (3-5 years)**

#### ***Action: Create a Big Sur North Coast Shuttle***

Implementing a shuttle service for visitors from the Crossroads Shopping Center at Rio Road in Carmel-by-the-Sea, five miles north of Mal Paso Creek Bridge, the “entrance” to Big Sur, to Big Sur Valley that would operate in a loop, is the priority option.

Another Monterey County initiative, ParkIt!, is working to establish additional parking space next to the Crossroads Shopping center at Marathon Flats, and to initially implement shuttle services to nearby Monterey Peninsula Regional Parks and to Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. Collaborating and expanding on this initiative could facilitate the establishment of a Big Sur North Coast Shuttle.

California businesses that wish to promote sustainable solutions to traffic issues, contributing to California's clean air and carbon emissions reduction goals, could also be interested in supporting the protection of Big Sur's natural environment and the coastline's beauty by supporting the shuttle service, in collaboration with other local private businesses, non-profits, and government agencies.

An example of such a successful public-private partnership is provided in the highlighted example, where the Island Explorer shuttle service has been successfully serving Acadia National Park and the local communities of Mt. Desert Island, Maine for more than a decade.

### ***Island Explorer Shuttle Service at Mount Desert Island in Maine***

*The clean-diesel powered shuttle serves Maine's Acadia National Park and the town of Bar Harbor and other small communities during the peak summer tourism season, from mid-June through Labor Day. A successful public-private partnership, the shuttle has been sponsored by iconic Maine brand L.L. Bean since 2002, carrying more than 8 million visitors since it began.*

*Ridership has increased annually, including a 3.3% increase in 2019 over 2018, thus also having a significant impact on reducing vehicle traffic, a major problem during the summer holiday season and a key reason for introducing the shuttle service. Plans were recently announced to implement a parking reservation system in 2021 for specific highly popular visitor areas of Acadia National Park (Cadillac Mountain and Ocean Drive scenic points) that also experience heavy visitor congestion during peak season to better manage traffic flow and the safety of visitors.*

***Action: Establish a Big Sur Valley Shuttle***

A Big Sur Valley Shuttle, servicing hiking and walking trail heads, campgrounds, restaurants, art galleries, and other community resources, is also recommended in the TDM. (Caltrans, 2020) Such a shuttle loop would provide an additional option for reducing vehicle traffic and encouraging access to the recreational activities available in Big Sur without driving a private vehicle. Many overnight visitors staying at the area’s hotels and campgrounds could access the local area, opportunities for exploring, doing day hikes, and visiting the iconic sites of Big Sur by using the Big Sur Valley Shuttle. Running the shuttle from Andrew Molera State Park in the north to Nepenthe or COAST Big Sur in the south, and coordinating the shuttle with the other proposed shuttle services, would further encourage visitors to leave their vehicles behind and use alternative forms of transportation.

With a convenient hop-on, hop-off schedule, and an option to combine riding the shuttle as part of a “Go Green” Day Pass, visitors would have multiple options for experiencing Big Sur without having to worry about parking, difficult driving conditions, and dealing with traffic themselves.

***Action: Establish a Big Sur South Coast Shuttle***

While accurate information is limited, available data indicates that more vehicle trips to Big Sur originate from Monterey County in the north than from San Luis Obispo County in the south. Thus, the biggest opportunity for reducing traffic congestion in Big Sur is with establishing the shuttles above. But visitors entering Big Sur from the south could also have the option of using a shuttle service to explore Big Sur without a vehicle. Thus, the establishment of a South Coast shuttle, with a potential embarkation point at Salmon Creek Ranger Station and ending at Nepenthe or COAST Big Sur, where it could connect with the Big Sur Valley Shuttle and/or the Big Sur North Coast Shuttle, would provide a public transportation option through the entire Big Sur corridor for those wishing to travel by alternative means and reduce their carbon footprint. Coordinating shuttle timings would be a key part of implementing such a shuttle service for Big

Sur. A Big Sur South Coast shuttle could be considered for implementation after initiating a Big Sur North Coast Shuttle, to evaluate the need and/or interest in expanding such a service to the south.

### **CHALLENGE: Rethinking Bixby Bridge and Other Popular Visitation Areas**

#### **Bixby Bridge**

Arguably no other visitor attraction in Big Sur has created as much concern and controversy as Bixby Bridge. It is one of the most photographed bridges in California due to its design, architecture, and stunning location. As such, it has joined the ranks of other world-famous bridges that attract multitudes of visitors and curiosity seekers such as the London Tower Bridge, Venice Rialto Bridge and Sydney Harbor Bridge. Bixby Bridge is among the tallest single-span concrete bridges and at the time of construction it was also the highest single-span arch bridge in the world. From the moment it was completed in 1932, it became a tourist attraction, with visitors staying nearby at what was then the Bixby Inn. In 1966, the bridge served as the dramatic backdrop for Lady Bird Johnson's official scenic road designation ceremony. Featured repeatedly in films and TV shows, it was already a popular tourist spot before the introduction of smartphones and social media led to dramatically increased visitation among "selfie tourists".

By 2019, Bixby Bridge had become the Big Sur poster child for alarm about poorly managed tourism crowds gathering and causing safety issues, traffic jams, litter problems and illegal camping. While the travel industry has seen a dramatic decrease in tourism because of the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020, Bixby Bridge and other popular visitor "hotspots" have continued to face traffic congestion and high visitation, particularly on weekends in Big Sur. Two things are clear: Given that Bixby Bridge has remained a popular visitor attraction for most of the last 100 years, it will continue to draw visitors as a sought after place to visit in Big Sur; and, as was emphasized repeatedly at Big Sur DSP stakeholder meetings, the status quo of chaotic and poorly managed visitor access to Bixby Bridge is neither desirable nor sustainable. This leads to Big Sur stakeholders



emphasizing the importance of finding a solution now to Bixby Bridge visitation problems.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 months)**

#### ***Action: Implement a 12-month Pilot Program to Eliminate all Visitor Stopping and Parking on Both East and West Sides of Highway 1 Before and After the Bridge, Including Old Coast Road***

This action should include having monitoring and enforcement in place to manage the new traffic flow and pattern while considering long term alternatives to address the current Bixby Bridge visitation situation.

Among the Bixby Bridge concerns are moving and parking violations; traffic congestion that compromises rapid emergency response, particularly during peak holiday periods, and impedes visitor access to other Big Sur recreation areas and scenic vistas; poorly controlled pedestrian movement on and near the bridge, resulting in public safety hazards; littering and waste disposal in the absence of trash receptacles and available restrooms for crowds of visitors who want to photograph the bridge and take “selfies” there.

Visitor infrastructure at the bridge is largely nonexistent beyond a handful of designated parking spaces quickly overwhelmed by the number of vehicles, particularly during weekends and holidays. In the absence of law enforcement resources readily available to manage the flow of traffic and visitor behavior, a 12-month pilot project should close Bixby Bridge to all vehicles stopping and parking there, including the first 150 yards of Old Coast Road from its entrance on Highway 1, while alternatives can be reviewed and determined. It is further recommended that physical barriers be used to narrow the entrance of Old Coast Road to additionally discourage the possibility of parking there. This 12-month pilot project will allow for a realistic assessment of other options to visitor vehicles stopping and parking at the bridge. The existing Monterey Transit bus

stop at the bridge could be maintained during the pilot project period, allowing access to those who use public transportation to stop at the bridge itself.

Based upon Big Sur stakeholder feedback, stationing law enforcement to monitor and enforce this pilot project of no-stopping or parking at the bridge during peak visitation times will be needed to ensure that walking on the roadway or on the bridge itself does not continue to be a problem. Law enforcement can also be supported by “Community Corps” paid monitors to assist visitors with information as well as to encourage responsible visitor behavior, with law enforcement to write citations if needed.

The relatively modest amount of funding required to station paid members of the “Community Corps” and a law enforcement official(s) to better monitor the visitor situation at Bixby Bridge, particularly during weekends and peak visitation holidays, while implementing the 12-month pilot program noted above, represents an opportunity to quickly reduce negative visitation impacts in the short term while long term alternative options are considered.

### **Long Term (3-5 years)**

#### ***Action: Redesign the Bixby Bridge Visitor Experience***

As has already been noted in this plan when it comes to addressing challenges and problems in Big Sur, there are multiple and sometimes conflicting jurisdictions involved, including county, state, and federal authorities. This is the same in the case of Bixby Bridge. A solution to the challenge of monitoring and controlling visitation at Bixby Bridge will require out-of-the-box thinking and the support of key agencies.

This plan recommends that, during the 12-month pilot program, long term options be reviewed to address the problem of visitor vehicles stopping and parking at Bixby Bridge, resulting in the illegal activities and unsafe behaviors that have been previously mentioned. Long term alternative options to consider

include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

1. Permanently close Bixby Bridge to all stopping and parking of vehicles, making it a drive-by-only visitor experience, with proper law enforcement stationed at the bridge to ensure violators are ticketed according to state and county traffic regulations. Given that this will have already been implemented during the previous 12-month pilot project, it may be easier to accomplish in the long term as word spreads among visitors that parking and stopping at the bridge is no longer permitted.
2. Allow visitor access to Bixby Bridge only for those who purchase a “Go Green” Day Pass and take the shuttle bus or ride the Monterey Transit Bus, which stop at Bixby Bridge. This can also be combined with #1 above.
3. Assess the potential for utilizing the Brazil Ranch, including a possible parking location near Highway 1 adjacent to the ranch, to be determined, along with establishing an environmentally-friendly accessible walking trail following a suitable location along the Coastal Terrace to an overlook point where Bixby Bridge is visible for visitor photos.

Both the parking and trail location would need to be determined carefully in relation to environmental impacts, safety, sites of archeological importance, land use designations, and in accordance with the BSLUP. According to the USFS, which acquired most of the Brazil Ranch in 2002, and the Coastal Commission (both agencies provided input as part of presenting this option in the DSP), the USFS must first complete an Access Management Plan, which they are required to do as part of the acquisition of Brazil Ranch. The Coastal Commission has stated that they would support a USFS Access Management Plan that also includes a trail along the coastal terrace with an overlook near Bixby Bridge. To date, a final long term Access Management Plan by USFS for Brazil Ranch has yet to be completed.

The above options represent potential scenarios for consideration. There are no “perfect” solutions to addressing the ongoing problematic visitation situation at Bixby Bridge, as each of the options presented above also have pros and cons that will need to be carefully considered. But within these options, there is a very real opportunity to change the status quo at Bixby Bridge for the better.

As one Big Sur community stakeholder commented during the DSP process, “The reality is that we are going to have to pick our poison when it comes to dealing with the visitation problems at Bixby.” Through compromise and careful review of both the short term and long term recommendations presented for consideration here, mitigating visitor problems at Bixby Bridge and creating a more positive experience for visitors and Big Sur residents is possible.

### **Pfeiffer Beach**

Pfeiffer Beach, accessed by transiting the winding and at times dangerous Sycamore Canyon Road from Highway 1, has long been a visitation “hotspot.” The private access road (with a public use easement granted to the USFS) not only provides a way to reach the iconic beach, part of USFS public lands, but it is also the access road for many local Big Sur residents who live there. Transiting up and down the narrow, at times one-lane-only road, can be treacherous, slow, and makes responding to any emergency even more difficult and dangerous. The road is an ongoing source of tension and concern for both residents and visitors and highlights the problem of managing access while also protecting Big Sur’s environment and ensuring that public health and safety are not jeopardized.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Short Term (12-24 months)**

##### ***Action: Implement a Parking Reservations System at Pfeiffer Beach***

Allow visitors to reserve their access to Pfeiffer Beach in advance by implementing a parking reservation system. The USFS, through its concessionaire, PMC, currently only charges a \$12 per day per vehicle parking fee which, in the

absence of an actual entrance fee, serves as a de-facto entrance fee for access to Pfeiffer Beach. Creating a reservation system for the parking spaces available presents an opportunity to better manage visitation to Pfeiffer Beach. Such parking reservation systems have been used successfully in other California U.S. National and State Parks to help manage the flow of visitors, while continuing to allow for visitor access.

An example of the successful implementation of a parking reservation system is at California's Muir Woods National Monument. Implemented in 2018, the system has enabled the park to better manage its visitation, while allowing for recreational access and enjoyment. Coupled with an existing shuttle service that has been offered for a number of years, the implementation of the parking reservation system at Muir Woods has improved the overall visitor experience, increased shuttle ridership, reduced traffic and overcrowding and helped to ameliorate environmental damage and concerns from the previous problematic parking issues that Muir Woods was experiencing.

### **Muir Woods National Monument**

In California's Muir Woods National Monument, a parking and shuttle system was implemented in 2018, which requires visitors to purchase a parking reservation in advance (minimum cost - \$8.50/vehicle), or they can park for free in designated outlying locations and use the shuttle services (\$3.25/person). Entrance to the national monument (\$15/person older than 16 years old) is in addition to the parking and shuttle service.

*“Visitation to Muir Woods National Monument increased significantly in the past decade (growing to 1.1 million visitors in 2016), resulting in increased public safety risks and unreasonable wait times for parking spaces. Limited parking coupled with high visitation led to unsafe illegal parking and foot traffic along narrow roads. The parking and shuttle reservation system better manages visitation levels, allows visitors to plan their trip in advance, and reduces overcrowding. In this way, the system has improved the overall visitor experience while also enhancing the protection and preservation of the surrounding natural resources.*

<https://gomuirwoods.com/muir/faq>

Parking slots at Pfeiffer Beach could be reserved for a set period (for example, 2-3 hours per reservation slot), and also staggered throughout the day to accommodate a reasonable number of vehicles entering and leaving the park at different times to manage traffic flow. Purchased online prior to arrival, vehicles would need to show their parking reservation pass to proceed down Sycamore Canyon Road to Pfeiffer Beach. Information could also be provided online to give visitors a better sense of what types of vehicles can safely navigate the road conditions to make the trip to the beach, due to the restricted nature of Sycamore Canyon Road, and provide the alternative of using the recommended Pfeiffer Beach Shuttle mentioned previously. In addition, a limited number of parking reservations could be designated on a first-come, first-serve basis to allow some flexibility for local residents and visitors to access the beach who may not have made reservations in advance online.

### **McWay Falls**

McWay Falls is another visitation “hotspot” along the Big Sur Coast. While direct access to the beach below the falls is prohibited, there is a well-marked trail from Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park that leads to vistas of the Falls. Many people simply park alongside the roadway to avoid having to pay the \$10 vehicle entrance fee to the State Park, creating road hazards and safety issues for both drivers and pedestrians as they move on and off the roadway. Improved education backed by enforcement efforts would encourage visitors to enter the parking area offered at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park and not park along Highway 1, improving their own safety and that of other vehicles traveling on the highway.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Short Term (12-24 months)**

#### ***Action: Eliminate all parking on Highway 1 North and South of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park***

Providing additional enforcement of traffic parking violations that impede the flow of vehicles on Highway 1, and providing education to direct visitors into the park, will be needed as part of implementing this action. Utilizing “Community

Corps” members to provide assistance, education, and guidance to visitors at McWay Falls to park in the State Park designated area, and use the pedestrian walkway under Highway 1 to more safely access McWay Falls, will also help to alleviate traffic congestion and visitor behavior problems at McWay Falls.

***Action: Implement a Parking Reservation System at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park***

A parking reservation system should be established at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park as a way to help address the issues of high visitation, parking, traffic congestion, and public safety that often dangerously interact at McWay Falls. This parking reservation system can be modeled on the same DSP recommendation for Pfeiffer Beach, and as has been successfully implemented at Muir Woods National Monument.

**CHALLENGE: Public Restroom Availability**

The fact that there are few public restrooms available for visitors to use along the Big Sur coast has been repeatedly identified as a critical issue by Big Sur residents and businesses. Human waste found along roadsides, in addition to other litter, presents health and environmental hazards that have taken on a new level of concern during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Establishments in Big Sur have complained of guest restrooms being overrun with visitors who are driving through and do not patronize their businesses, while their actual patrons have to contend with a steady flow of people in and out of bathrooms meant for customer use. Visitors indicate that information about what restrooms are available, and where they are located, is not clearly communicated, and access to those bathrooms is also not always granted. Visitors desperate for a bathroom when coming off a beach or a hike find themselves unable to locate facilities.

State Parks, which are supposed to provide public access to their bathrooms without paying an entrance fee, do not always allow visitors to use those facilities, especially if parking is already crowded. The policy of allowing non-paying visitors to use bathrooms is also not consistent across jurisdictions – State Parks allow it,

USFS/PMC do not, and it is not always clear to visitors which is which. All public land management agencies have stated that they will allow visitors to use a restroom if it is *really* needed, but this is not always the experience in reality, as was confirmed during the DSP process. For visitors new to the Big Sur coast, and simply seeking a restroom, the rules are anything but clear, and lack of access to public restrooms is likely to continue as a source of contention and frustration for locals and visitors alike.

This issue has plagued Big Sur for many years, and long term solutions such as building more bathrooms also have to navigate the complexities of multi-agency jurisdictions, the requirements of the Big Sur Land Use Plan and the Coastal Act to not impede on the “critical viewshed,” funding constraints, and going through the required and necessary environmental and other permitting processes. In short, a multitude of regulations and jurisdictions has effectively created a problem that is harmful to health, sanitation, and the environment, in the name of protecting the environment and promoting visitor access.

There are two particular aspects to ameliorating the problem of restroom access along the Big Sur Coast: ensuring access to existing restrooms, while providing better information, education and signage to help visitors “do the right thing;” and providing additional restrooms. This plan calls for both.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 Months)**

#### ***Action: Improve Access and Provide Better Signage for Existing Restrooms***

Co-locate additional clear signage designating bathrooms and trash receptacles so that visitors are aware of bathroom and trash facilities being available as they approach them (i.e. at State Parks, etc.). Use consistent signage to familiarize visitors with restrooms and trash facilities, providing visitor education to help promote easy identification.





Include information about restrooms in Big Sur on a sign welcoming at the north and south entry points (out of the viewshed), so that visitors are again reminded of the limitations of bathroom availability. One option would be to consider using Dynamic Message Signs that could offer a rotating set of messages to visitors as they enter Big Sur. For example, the sign at the north entrance to Big Sur might have a message that says, “There are limited public restrooms for the next 70 miles. The next public restroom is in 20 miles at Andrew Molera State Park. Please help protect the health and beauty of Big Sur.”

***Action: Work with State and Federal Agencies where Public Restrooms are Located to Ensure a Clear and Consistent Policy for Public Use***

All of the visitor-serving public lands in Big Sur should have the same policy of allowing visitors access to use the restroom without having to pay an entrance fee, and this must be conveyed to on-the-ground personnel so that it is understood and implemented on site. USFS/PMC day use area (DUA) facilities should be aligned with the current State Parks policy that allows visitors temporary entrance to use a public restroom without paying the entrance fee. This will allow for consistency to the messaging about access to restrooms and less confusion among visitors.

Along with providing improved information about restroom and trash receptacle locations, improved cleaning and servicing of facilities should be implemented, particularly during high visitation periods. The Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” could provide a source of additional funding for servicing restrooms available to the public, through cooperative agreements with the State Parks and USFS/PMC, thus helping to alleviate some of the additional costs involved in improving and increasing access to restroom facilities.

Enforcement of existing laws that prohibit overnight parking and camping alongside Highway 1, and encouraging visitors to use designated campgrounds, would also contribute to lessening the amount of human waste that is left behind at unofficial viewpoints and turn-outs.

### **Long Term (3-5 Years)**

A number of new restrooms are currently planned in the Big Sur Highway 1 corridor, and there are opportunities for siting additional restrooms that would conform to the Big Sur Land Use Plan - both are a welcome step in the right direction to address this serious problem, even more so in light of concerns for public health and safety post-pandemic. Indeed, the BSLUP does allow for the development of highway facilities, including restrooms, provided they are consistent with the stated detailed policies of the plan (see below for additional reference to these sections of the BSLUP).

#### ***Action: Prioritize Sites Already Identified on State Park Land for Restrooms at Garrapata Beach, McWay Falls, Soberanes, and Partington Cove***

Four sites for additional bathrooms on State Park lands have already been identified, with site and design plans developed. Each site is designed to help improve access to restroom facilities in popular recreation areas, and to improve the services available for residents and visitors alike when visiting these parks. The four sites are: on the east side of Highway 1 at Soberanes (where several poorly-signed, poorly-maintained port-a-potties are currently located); at Garrapata Beach; at McWay Falls; and at Partington Cove. Funding and permitting work, including required Environmental Impact Assessments, remain to be done for these four designated restroom locations.

Based on the current issues seen with human waste left on the side of the road, it is recommended that progress toward the already approved restroom locations at Garrapata Beach, followed by additional facilities at McWay, Soberanes, and Partington Cove, be made a top implementation priority, with further progress made to secure the funding to initiate restroom site and design plans and carry out required environmental assessments and permitting processes at each location, with a timeline established for completion.

Stakeholders noted that during the Shelter-In-Place restrictions implemented for the coronavirus pandemic during Spring 2020, with public facilities and businesses

largely closed, the problem of human waste along the highway increased substantially. As Big Sur re-opens, public access to restrooms needs to be prioritized to address increased public health and environmental hazard concerns.

***Action: Consider Restrooms, if Consistent with the BSLUP, at Abalone Cove, the Vista Point north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, and the Vista Point South of Big Creek***

The Big Sur Coast Highway Management Plan (CHMP) designates three areas along Highway 1 as Vista Points, defined as:

“a formally designated (and signed) paved area beyond the highway that provides a visitor-serving amenity along the highway...The vista point designation denotes a level of permanence (or at least longevity) along the route affording it regular maintenance corresponding to the level of use. Vista Points provide for short term parking and may include other amenities such as walkways, interpretive displays, drinking water and restrooms.” (Caltrans, 2004)

These three Vista Points are near Abalone Cove, north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, and south of Big Creek. The BSLUP, while prohibiting development within the critical viewshed, provides an exception for Highway 1 facilities, including restrooms. (*BSLUP, Sections 3.2.5 C.1, 4.1.3 B.3*)

To date, the vista point north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park is the most developed, and it is recommended that a restroom first be constructed at this location that meets with BSLUP stipulations, recognizing that securing funding, designing the site, completing all of the necessary permitting and environmental processes, and doing the actual construction places this in the 3-5 year long term DSP project recommendations, followed by (or ideally, simultaneously with) restroom facilities being installed at the two other Vista Points near Abalone Cove and south of Big Creek. On-site reconnaissance of the vista point north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park was conducted by a representative of the California Coastal Commission together with members of the DSP team, and areas within the vista point were identified that could accommodate sensitively designed

visitor restrooms, screened from view of Highway 1, and not intruding into the critical viewshed, in keeping with the requirements of the BSLUP.

***Action: Explore Tax Rebates and Incentives for Private Businesses to Expand Restroom Facilities for the Public.***

Some Big Sur private businesses have indicated their desire to open their restrooms to the public, if they can get support in the form of tax rebates or incentives for renovation and construction to enhance their own restroom facilities to include public access. This would be a way to both address the need for more public restroom access in Big Sur and support local businesses, and this should be further explored.

**CHALLENGE: Addressing Trash and Litter Problems**

Among the most important components of well-planned visitor management for popular destinations visited by tourists is trash collection and removal. It is also one of the more significant concerns raised during multiple DSP stakeholder meetings and noted in the online survey results - the growing amount of litter and trash left behind by visitors to Big Sur. Various reasons can be attributed to this, including a lack of monitoring and enforcement of anti-littering ordinances, the absence of public trash receptacles, and infrequent or no garbage collection in high visitation areas, along with limited information to better educate visitors not to litter or leave trash at roadside stops.

In addition, there has been an ongoing lack of public funding to provide roadside litter clean up and garbage collection. Local volunteer efforts to collect litter along roadsides, such as “Litter Getters”, help clean trash from alongside the highway, but road safety concerns make such endeavors difficult to maintain. Outside of a handful of State Park designated trash receptacles, what this means collectively is that there are far and few places for public garbage disposal found along the Big Sur coastline.

Given that so much effort has been made through decades of conservation initiatives to protect Big Sur's natural environment, and with Highway 1 officially designated as a special scenic route, the lack of a clear plan to address trash and litter, with the funding support needed, is all the more problematic. The recommendations presented below represent actionable ideas to address this problem in both the near future and in the long term.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 Months)**

#### ***Action: Launch a "Keep Big Sur Clean and Pristine" Campaign***

When the tiny country of Belize embarked on a national sustainable tourism destination strategy - a public-private partnership including the Belize Tourism Board, Belize Ecotourism Society and Belize Tourism Industry Association - one of the key challenges facing the country was roadside trash and litter, particularly around popular tourism sites. In response, they launched a visitor education campaign called "*Betta No Litta*" in the local English Creole vernacular, which successfully worked to quickly capture the attention of visitors and locals alike to support the clean-up effort by reducing litter in public places.

For Big Sur, there is a "low hanging fruit" opportunity to also launch a creative visitor campaign based upon "pack it in/pack it out" and "leave no trace" principles. An initiative such as a "Keep Big Sur Clean and Pristine" communication campaign, or something similarly named to capture visitor attention, could also be explored as a public-private partnership with the MCCVB, Visit California, local Big Sur businesses, along with local community and conservation groups to support this messaging in brochures, social media and online, where feasible. This would require relatively little funding for addressing a significant problem that, if left unaddressed, is likely to grow more problematic in the post-pandemic tourism economy.

As part of its own 2020 Destination Stewardship and Sustainable Travel draft plan, Visit California has also stated that it intends to embark on the creation of a resident-focused civic pride campaign, and noted effective anti-litter campaigns such as “Don’t Mess with Texas” and Ireland’s “TidyTowns” initiatives as models. As Visit California moves forward to implement its own anti-litter campaign, there is also an opportunity for Big Sur to benefit from support for a “Keep Big Sur Clean and Pristine” visitor campaign.

***Action: Utilize Temporary Placement of Additional Trash Receptacles During Peak Visitation Periods***

In addition to the above, it is recommended that *temporary* trash receptacles be placed at specific hotspot visitor areas along Highway 1, such as Soberanes, Garrapata Beach, Bixby Bridge, McWay Falls, among others, during peak visitation periods - summer weekends and holidays. This will further help to reduce the amount of trash and litter left behind on Big Sur’s roadsides.

Supporting the above could also be a local version of California’s “Adopt a Highway” program. In this instance, the Big Sur “Sustainability Fund” and Big Sur and Monterey businesses could contribute to funding periodic roadside litter clean-ups, as well as the collection of trash from temporary public waste receptacles. In addition, members of the “Community Corps” could further assist in maintaining the program, thereby providing additional part-time employment opportunities for Big Sur residents that also support roadside litter collection and monitoring. Hosting volunteer clean-ups with organizations such as Tourism Cares, which has helped to organize similar volunteer clean-up events in California and other locations, should also be considered.

**Long Term (3-5 Years)**

***Action: Create Incentives for Reducing Roadside Trash and Litter***

Ensure that trash receptacles are included at any new restroom facility constructed (per above recommendations), with clear signage indicating trash

receptacles open to the public. In addition, consider establishing incentives for local businesses through tax rebates or other tax benefits to include extra trash receptacles at their locations for public use. This could have the added benefit of providing more trash receptacles for visitor use, while also attracting more customers into local businesses. Visitor information and messaging about a “Keep Big Sur Clean and Pristine” campaign can also include a list of trash receptacle locations to dispose of trash in a legal and environmentally-friendly manner.

### **CHALLENGE: Back Country and Front Country Visitation Management**

While driving on Highway 1 introduces visitors to the natural beauty of the Big Sur Coast, it also provides access to miles of inland hiking trails and dispersed camping sites. For the purposes of the DSP, the lands accessible for camping and hiking are designated as “front country” and “back country”.

Front Country is defined as areas accessible from Highway 1 by motorized vehicle for the purposes of dispersed car camping and other recreational activities.

Roads in Big Sur that provide access to dispersed camping for motorized vehicles and other recreational activities include Palo Colorado Road, Old Coast Road, Central Coast Road, Nacimiento-Fergusson Road, South Coast Ridge Road, Plaskett Ridge Road and Los Burros (Willow Creek), where many Big Sur residents also make their homes.

Back Country indicates lands that are remote and difficult to access and are available by trails from the east side of Highway 1 in Big Sur for walking, hiking, backpacking and equestrian hiking. Miles of back country trails climb up from the coast into the dramatic canyons and ridges of the Santa Lucia mountains, with trails offering short day-hikes to multi-day treks, from such popular trail heads as Soberanes Canyon in the north to the Pine Ridge Trail that departs from Big Sur Station, to the Prewitt Loop in the south.

While there are defined campsites within the State Parks and LPNF that are available by reservation, there are many campsites that require no registration,

reservations, or permits to enter and use. The lack of monitoring and effective management of these areas has led to significant negative environmental impacts, including wildfires originating from illegal campfires, and increases in litter, trash, and human waste that has not been properly disposed of according to established “leave no trace” guidelines, raising heightened concerns for the health and safety of the environment, and of visitors and residents alike. This is particularly true for front country dispersed camping areas, where nearby residents are impacted by problematic visitor behavior that can directly affect their well-being.

Concerns about fire safety in Big Sur are especially pertinent, given that the 2016 Soberanes Fire, which burned for five months and destroyed over 50 homes, was traced to an illegal campfire in Garrapata State Park. The 2019 Mill Fire was also traced to an illegal campfire. And the start of the 2020 fire season saw two fires in June, one from an illegal campfire and one from a vehicle driving illegally in an area that caused underbrush to catch fire. While campfires require a permit when allowed, and the permits are available online, they are designated for specific areas only, and are illegal during fire season. In the absence of effective visitor monitoring, these laws are routinely ignored, and this lack of monitoring, management, and enforcement endangers Big Sur residents, as well as the visitors themselves. Trash, litter, and human waste are also endangering the environment, the local water supply, and wildlife.

The importance of managing visitor behavior has been brought into stark relief during the coronavirus pandemic, when the first Shelter-In-Place orders initially allowed people to continue to use U.S. Forest Service roads. The result was people flocking to dispersed camping areas in the front country. A pilot traffic data collection program in place on the main South Coast access roads to dispersed camping areas recorded a dramatic increase in traffic on these roads after the Shelter-In-Place orders were implemented. This eventually led to the closure of LPNF Forest Roads to contain and curtail reckless visitor behavior. With limited enforcement capabilities, illegal activities continued. Indeed, the first fire



of the 2020 fire season started from an illegal campfire in the front country above Plaskett Creek Campground on June 3, requiring many emergency resources to contain it.

Visitation management of front country and back country areas of Big Sur to ensure the protection of the natural environment - including habitat, water resources, flora and fauna, and reducing the negative impacts of irresponsible human behavior - is an important part of the overall destination stewardship of Big Sur. It is an especially important issue to Big Sur residents, as well as to those who cherish access to the remote wilderness areas that can be accessed along the Big Sur coast.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 Months)**

#### ***Action: Implement a Pilot Back Country Self-Directed Registration System to Gather Visitor Use Data***

Ventana Wilderness Alliance has developed a pilot self-registration trail permit system, with initial implementation targeted for the popular Pine Ridge Trail (when it re-opens, currently scheduled for Fall 2020), which will begin a process of collecting data on back country visitor use, and provide the opportunity for enhanced visitor education. The purpose of this pilot self-registration system is to begin to collect data that will lead to better management of back country areas that are entered from Big Sur. Based on the data gathered, the hope is to expand self-registration to other trails in Big Sur that lead into the back country, creating a better understanding and management of back country visitor impacts. This initial pilot system is the first step in developing a more in-depth and robust management plan for the back country areas accessed from the Big Sur coast.

Visitor registration systems are used by the U.S. Forest Service, in state and national parks, and other wilderness areas across the United States, and implementing such a system in Big Sur is necessary for better visitation

management and monitoring of health and safety, as well as environmental and natural habitat impacts. The implementation of the pilot self-registration system at the Pine Ridge Trail (which is modeled on a system developed for Oregon's Deschutes National Forest) should be followed by further implementation of registration for access into the back country from the coast in Big Sur, making for a safer and better experience for all.

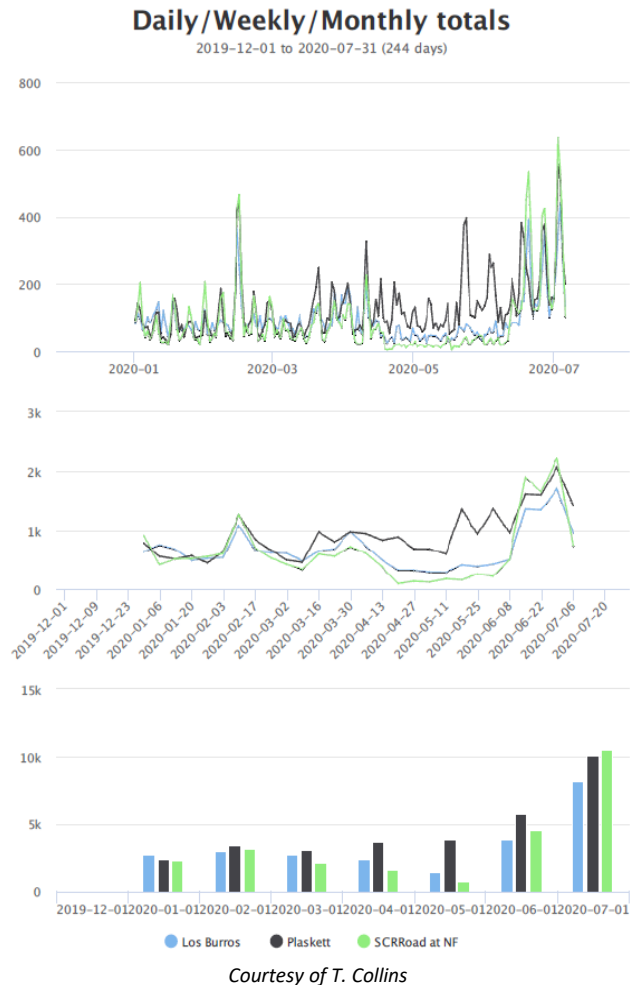
***Action: Establish an Online Self-Registration and Permit System for Back Country Trail Heads Accessed from the Big Sur Coast***

An online registration process with a minimal or sliding-scale fee structure would provide resources and information about back country use and updated emergency information for visitors, such as wildfire, landslide, or earthquake events. Implementing a registration system to record anyone venturing into and visiting the back country from trail head entrances in Big Sur is a priority, given increased public health and safety concerns, wildfire concerns, and limited monitoring and enforcement resources that endanger both visitors and residents. Once data on the use of back country areas is better understood, a permit/quota system could be established to regulate particular back country campsites that suffer from overuse to allow for campsites to recover and be better maintained and managed going forward.

***Action: Restrict Front Country Overnight Dispersed Camping during Peak Wildfire Season***

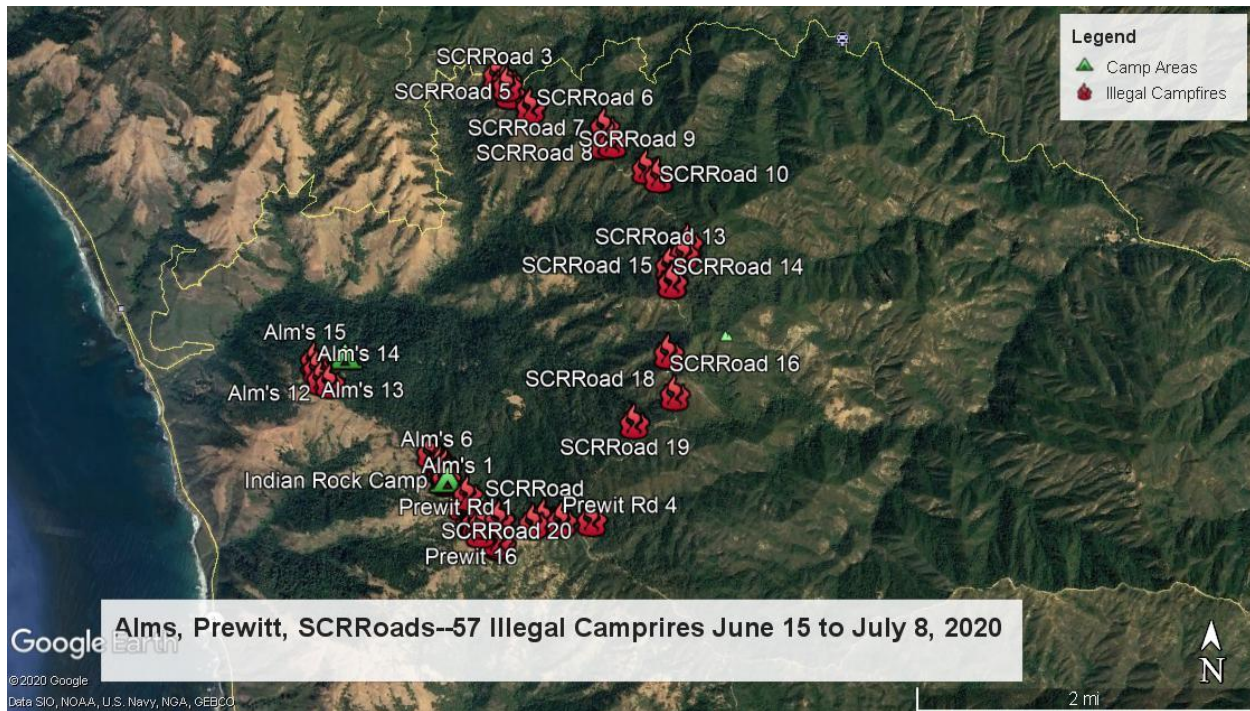
In light of increased public health and safety concerns, front country dispersed camping should be restricted during fire season (dates to align with heightening of LPNF fire restrictions - generally May or June - until such restrictions end - generally October or November) until a well-managed and monitored Visitor Use Management (VUM) Plan (see below) can be developed and implemented.

At the beginning of 2020, a 12-month local effort to better understand visitor traffic to dispersed camping areas on the South Coast was launched. The traffic study, which is privately funded, has implemented daily traffic counts on three South Coast access roads. It has provided important information and data over seven months and has been particularly valuable in monitoring the actual realities on the ground as coronavirus pandemic orders have been implemented and changed, beginning in late March 2020.



This information has also influenced USFS decisions about road and dispersed camping closures in LPNF during the pandemic. For example, after California’s statewide Shelter-In-Place order was issued on March 19, 2020, the USFS first closed Monterey District’s Developed Recreation Sites and developed campgrounds, except trail heads, on March 28, 2020. The study’s traffic monitoring quickly showed a dramatic increase in vehicle travel on these South Coast roads and resultant illegal behavior in the dispersed camping sites, leading to the actual closure of these roads on April 15, 2020.

Activity quickly increased when these USFS roads re-opened on June 14, despite fire restrictions (which were implemented on May 12, 2020 across LPNF), with 57 illegal campfires recorded in the period from June 15 - July 8, 2020.



Courtesy of T. Collins

Clearly, restrictions must be implemented while long term effective monitoring and management strategies are developed. Increased fines and penalties for illegal behavior, adequate enforcement resources, implementing regulations, ordinances, and laws pertinent to the front country camping areas of Big Sur, are among the strategies that can be considered to address the significant concerns to health and safety expressed by residents and other responsible wilderness advocates.

The need for adequate funding of public land management at the county, state, and federal levels is a critical and ongoing issue that must be pursued with added emphasis, given current circumstances that lead to climate change induced increases in wildfire risks. Dealing with the most egregious dispersed camping issues in the front country must be addressed, and restrictions and/or closures of dispersed camping areas and/or USFS Forest Roads for visitor use during peak wildfire season are a short term measure to ameliorate some of these dangers.

***Action: Utilize “Community Corps” members to assist with education and information for visitors***

In addition to the volunteer rangers trained by Ventana Wilderness Alliance that assist with managing the back country, utilizing “Community Corps” members will also provide additional support and education at trail heads and entry points to dispersed camping areas, especially during peak and critical visitation times. The Ventana Wilderness Alliance’s trained volunteer rangers help monitor the back country, particularly observing environmental degradation and damage, illegal behavior, campfires, and other visitor behavior issues. The addition of “Community Corps” members stationed at entries to popular trail heads or dispersed camping areas, would further enhance visitor education in regard to accessing these areas of Big Sur.

**Long Term (3-5 Years)**

***Action: Create a Back Country and Front Country Visitor Use Management Plan***

Using the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council “Visitor Use Management Framework, A Guide to Providing Sustainable Outdoor Recreation,” (IVUMC-VUM), a long term plan should be developed to monitor and manage visitor use in Big Sur’s back country and front country wilderness areas. This framework, launched in late 2016 by a council of six federal land management agencies (Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to implement best practices in managing access to public lands in responsible ways, with a goal towards minimizing negative impacts and improving positive outcomes, builds on previous work in visitor use management, while providing a flexible set of tools.

For Big Sur, the VUM Framework can be utilized to develop a management plan for both back country and front country visitor use and access for the BSLUP area. Implementing a long term visitor management strategy and plan based on this framework, following the implementation of a self-registration system in the

short term, could garner the support of the multiple jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations in Big Sur that collectively work to manage the inland and wilderness areas that are critical to the long term health of Big Sur's natural environment.

Funds from the Big Sur "Sustainability Fund," in addition to other grant funds, could help to support the implementation of such a long term VUM plan, and this plan would provide a key component to the overall management of Big Sur. With the TDM focused on Highway 1 infrastructure and related improvements, the DSP focused on visitor management in Big Sur, and a VUM Plan for back country and front country public lands, better coordination of positive outcomes from visitor impacts across the BSLUP will be achieved.

### **CHALLENGE: Visitor Education and Communication**

The old saying that "the pen is mightier than the sword" also rings true when it comes to crafting the right messages for educating visitors about respectful and responsible behavior in Big Sur. Visit California and the MCCVB are both tasked with supporting California's tourism economy, which is a major source of jobs and revenue for the State, with visitors spending 1.4 billion dollars in 2019. (Visit California, 5/7/2020) Predictions in 2020 put visitor spending at less than 50 percent of that, according to the California Forecast 2020 Analysis Overview Summary, with the likelihood of it being years before tourism revenues reach pre-pandemic levels.

As the travel industry re-opens, with specific guidelines required for operating during the coronavirus pandemic, and given the dramatic drop in tourism arrivals across the United States and around the world, Visit California as well as county tourism boards such as the MCCVB are particularly focused on marketing to help the state recover economically. This includes promoting outdoor recreational and scenic areas such as Big Sur to benefit from the regional driving tourism market, which is expected to be the first tourism sector to rebound in the USA.

As it has for much of the last century, Big Sur is likely to continue to be one of California's most popular visitor destinations. As such, the pandemic that brought tourism to a near standstill in California and elsewhere also provides an important opportunity to reassess marketing and visitor messaging and, in particular, how Big Sur is promoted as a travel experience.

The following recommendations are designed to reflect how tourism marketing authorities, together with Big Sur businesses and community members, can all play a role in further educating and inspiring visitors to be part of Big Sur's commitment to environmental stewardship, while also enjoying the region's natural beauty.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Short Term: 12-24 Months**

##### ***Action: Launch a New Visitor Education and Communication Campaign Based on How to Enjoy and Protect Big Sur***

A key mandate of the MCCVB is to promote visitation to Monterey attractions and services to support local jobs and businesses through a successful tourism economy. Building on their new "Responsibility Matters" initiative, it is recommended that MCCVB also create a new visitor communication campaign on how everyone can enjoy Big Sur's beautiful natural environment while helping to protect it for future generations. This can also build upon the messaging in the Big Sur Pledge, which welcomes visitors and invites them to enjoy Big Sur responsibly. Other destinations that have successfully launched similar communication strategies include Moab, Utah, with their online campaign, "Visit Like a Local" (Moab, 2020). Similarly, the small European country of Slovenia has been recognized with international awards, including Best Green Destination in the World, for their successful visitor messaging campaign called "Slovenia Green," inspiring and educating tourists on how to enjoy a wonderful vacation while also supporting Slovenia's commitment to protecting the natural environment.

The campaign should develop consistent messaging in multiple languages that reflects Big Sur's ethos across multiple formats, both pre-arrival and while in Big Sur. While different messaging platforms and formats may be utilized to reach different audiences, and adapted accordingly, the overall message about protecting Big Sur and visiting responsibly should be consistent across the campaign.

In taking such a tourism communication approach, with messaging consistently reinforcing Big Sur as a place to enjoy, cherish, preserve and protect, the MCCVB and Visit California can continue to support the local economy of Big Sur while supporting the goals of the BSLUP to protect the environment. In fact, there is also growing evidence that destinations that connect protecting the environment with visitation actually strengthen the local economy even more, as a new generation of travelers seeks to explore the world and have a positive impact on the places they visit.

***Action: Strengthen Information that Distinguishes Big Sur as a Place of Unique Experiences to Visit, Connect with Nature, and Care for the Planet.***

Building on the above recommendation, the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce and CABS websites can also be important and helpful sources of information for visitors to Big Sur. And similarly, with the launch of a "Go Green" day pass website, there are multiple opportunities to establish Big Sur as a model of destination stewardship that cares for visitors, cares for local people, and cares for the environment.

The Big Sur Chamber of Commerce website could consider adding a specific tab, perhaps called "Destination Stewardship" or "We Care" that will be easy for visitors to find, with a hyperlink to the CABS website, where information on how to be a sustainable traveler could be found, along with other creative ways to engage visitors. This could include identifying experiences such as volunteering for a few hours or a day to create a more meaningful and fun local experience such as adding to the Community Art Project, assisting with the removal of



invasive species, volunteering in the community garden, and similar activities. These are some easy ways to create a more robust visitor experience with direct connections to the community.

“Community Corps” members could also assist in connecting and directing visitors to such experiences, as well as helping to lead them. In addition, a team of “Community Corps” members can also help to provide important positive messaging on how to visit Big Sur responsibly on social media by monitoring and responding to social media posts and continuing to reinforce messaging about how to enjoy and help protect Big Sur.

### **Long Term: 3-5 Years**

#### ***Action: Establish a Visitor Education Facility at the North and South Ends of the Big Sur Coast***

The Big Sur Land Use Plan recommends that “roadside visitor information centers be established near the north of Big Sur and at San Simeon at the south end” (BSLUP, Section 4.2.4.b), and the DSP also supports this. In addition to improving online visitor education and information prior to arrival in Big Sur, a Visitor Education Center (many education centers are now being called “interpretive centers”) would be a great way to provide visitors with real-time information about Big Sur while enhancing their understanding of Big Sur’s commitment to destination stewardship. In addition, an innovative Interpretation Center can become a visitor attraction in and of itself - a good thing - as it exposes more visitors to the opportunity to be better educated about the place they are visiting, including environmentally-friendly practices and behavior.

For example, the twin municipalities of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores in coastal Alabama partnered with Gulf Shores State Park to create better visitor education experiences as part of their destination stewardship plan. The park crosses both municipal jurisdictions, with 28 miles of hiking trails and nine distinct ecosystems, home to rare and endemic species that renowned biologist and conservationist,

Dr. E.O. Wilson, has called “America’s Amazon” because of its high biodiversity. The result is the Gulf Shores Interpretive Center, which is one of only 50 “Living Buildings” in the world - the highest standard in sustainability. Not only does the Gulf Shores Interpretive Center provide helpful information on visiting Coastal Alabama, but it also includes numerous interactive activities that teach visitors about the importance of protecting the area’s natural environment, while learning about sustainable living. The Gulf Shores Interpretive Center has now become a popular place for visitors to go, to gather information about the natural and cultural heritage of the area, and to learn about a “Living Building” that is 100% sustainably designed. The center also includes interpretive activities for children that teach them about the local ecology and wildlife on land and sea, and the importance of a clean environment, water conservation, and renewable energy.

Big Sur could greatly benefit from having a similar Visitor Interpretive Center that speaks to the area’s outdoor recreational opportunities, cultural attractions, and the importance of environmental protection. Such a Big Sur Visitor Interpretive Center would require needed funding to establish, but it is included here for consideration.

***Option #1:*** One stakeholder idea put forward was that the Hudson House, just north of Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, could be converted into an Interpretive Center for the area, in collaboration with the state, thus allowing for visitors driving south on Highway 1 to have a place to stop for information on Big Sur before they arrive in the Big Sur Valley at Mile 46, where Big Sur Station, a multi-service agency facility that currently serves as a limited visitor information hub, is located.

***Option #2:*** While a Big Sur Visitor Interpretive Center would be the first choice, given limited funding options as California emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, an alternative way to provide visitor information for drivers heading to scenic Highway 1, would be to establish a visitor information kiosk at the north

entrance to Big Sur, in conjunction with ParkIt!, at Crossroads Shopping Center at Rio Road. Such a facility need not be large and can be designed in keeping with the local character of the area as well as sustainable principles.

Establishing a visitor information kiosk at the north end of Big Sur, where the majority of visitors enter from, in conjunction with offering shuttle services and providing updated information about restrooms, traffic conditions, etc. will encourage better visitor behavior, re-enforce education about protecting Big Sur's natural resources, and provide real-time information about what to expect on the road ahead in regards to driving conditions, traffic, as well as information about art galleries, cafes, restaurants, accommodations, etc.

As ParkIt! moves forward, it also provides an opportunity to utilize an existing space at Crossroads Shopping Center for a Big Sur Information Kiosk that is easily accessible to visitors and provides access to parking as well as to shuttle services. Sales of a "Go Green" Day Pass could also provide a potential source of funding for the Information Kiosk.

***Option 3:*** After a Big Sur information kiosk is established at the north entrance to Big Sur, it is recommended that a similar kiosk be located to provide visitors accessing Big Sur from the south an opportunity to use a restroom, gather up-to-date information about road conditions, etc. Potential locations to be considered for the South Coast information kiosk are San Simeon or the Salmon Creek Ranger Station. The ranger station is located just a few miles north of the Monterey/San Luis Obispo county line, and has buildings and facilities that could be rehabilitated for such a purpose, including parking access that could be further developed and also serve as an embarkation point for a South Coast shuttle service. It currently serves as an entry point to several self-service hiking trails and could also serve as a registration point for people heading into the back country to hike and/or camp.

### **CHALLENGE: Available Community Housing**

Throughout California's Coastal Zone, the social cost of environmental preservation is most evident in the high cost of housing. The original drafters of the California Coastal Act predicted that regulations designed to protect the coast from overdevelopment would ultimately also contribute to an increase in the cost of coastal home ownership by wealthier segments of society and a corresponding lack of affordable housing for workers and their families, meaning in some instances that people who were born and grew up in coastal zone areas would no longer be able to afford a home to live there, including Big Sur. For this reason, the California Coastal Act initially included a provision for low and moderate income housing. But this housing provision was overturned after only five years.

Compounding this issue, in the past decade Big Sur has sustained three major wildfires that have destroyed houses and living opportunities, which in most cases have yet to return. Combined with restrictive land-use policies and the economics of supply and demand, the result today is that little available community housing exists in Big Sur. Additionally, a large percentage of the workforce is employed by hospitality and tourism-related businesses, making employee-related housing needs a major challenge for Big Sur's business community.

Over the years, the proliferation of second-home ownership has further decreased the availability of rental homes for people who live and work in Big Sur. Single-family homes, caretaker units, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are severely limited in availability for residents of Big Sur and often sit empty in neighborhoods that once housed a greater number of community members. Thus, unless you are already a current homeowner, it is increasingly difficult to remain a part of the Big Sur community.

Lack of housing in Big Sur threatens the community in multiple ways. The loss of neighborhoods that once housed families and the employees of local establishments has led to declining school enrollments, the inability of the workforce to live and work in Big Sur, environmental and traffic impacts created

by long commutes, and the increased difficulty of retaining employees in Big Sur businesses. Not only are the travel conditions on the already over-burdened Highway 1 corridor worsened by commuters, but without residents, men and women are no longer available to provide critical local services, such as volunteering for Big Sur Fire and the Mid Coast Fire Brigade, the Big Sur Health Center, Big Sur Community Emergency Response Team, and other vital community services.

This was raised repeatedly in community stakeholder consultations during the DSP process, and was particularly brought up as a serious concern among the younger generation, many of whom were born in Big Sur or raised there, and are struggling to live in Big Sur due to the costs and availability of housing. It is not uncommon to hear them lament that their experience of growing up in Big Sur will not be something they will be able to provide for their own families.

The issue of available community housing in Big Sur has also been fraught with controversy on where it could be located, and how such housing could and would be consistent with the BSLUP. A number of ideas have been put forward to provide more available housing in Big Sur, such as long term residential rental housing on public and private lands, including at the former Point Sur Naval Facility (NAVFAC) that is part of California's Point Sur State Historic Park; on privately owned land; the expansion of existing employer-based housing; and the conversion of ADUs, existing caretaker units, and guesthouse units into long term rental housing.

In 2018, the Community Association of Big Sur attempted to purchase a parcel of land for providing additional community housing. Experts from the Big Sur Land Trust, the Community Foundation for Monterey County and CHISPA were also engaged in the process. Though ultimately the project did not succeed, similar efforts should continue to identify other opportunities in appropriate locations to add community housing that is also consistent with the BSLUP. Where appropriate, the expansion of ADU opportunities and employee housing units

needs to also be addressed in the BSLUP update process currently underway, and Big Sur's two LUACs have made suggestions to this effect.

The recommendations below are meant to help contribute to efforts to address this important matter.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short Term (12-24 Months)**

#### ***Action: Expand Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Address Short Term Rentals***

The expansion of ADUs may provide the most immediate opportunity in Big Sur to add to community housing availability. Recent California state law has reduced policy barriers in the permitting process for ADUs. Monterey County is required to "harmonize these new requirements with Local Coastal Program and Coastal Act requirements." (California Coastal Commission, 2020)

Currently, in the Big Sur Land Use Plan area, the minimum lot size for the establishment of an ADU is two acres and the development of ADUs are limited to the first 50 approved by the BSLUP at the time of adoption. We recommend the Big Sur community work with local policy-makers in order to more fully understand the new opportunities California's recent ADU legislation provides and to determine what steps can be taken to bring Big Sur's Local Coastal Program into compliance with state law. In addition to providing community housing, ADUs can provide income to homeowners who may be asset rich but cash poor. Pursuant to this legislation, new ADUs in Big Sur would not be allowed to be rented for terms shorter than 30 days.



























Short term rentals, such as Airbnb, are an issue that has also been raised in almost every multi-stakeholder forum convened as part of the DSP process. A Vacation Rental Ordinance is currently under consideration by Monterey County.

It is clear that the availability of rental housing for the community in Big Sur and the proliferation of short term rentals do coincide and it should be determined by the Board of Supervisors, for the health of the community, whether and how one has impacted the other. While such a study is outside the purview of this plan, the Monterey County Planning Commission has recommended that the Board of Supervisors undertake this analysis so that clear policy is enacted for short term rentals that is in compliance with the BSLUP. Big Sur stakeholders should continue to monitor and engage in these efforts to ensure that any final policies are in keeping with the needs of the Big Sur community.

### **Long Term (3-5 years)**

With state and county policy review and changes relating to ADUs and short term rentals currently in process, it is recommended to await these outcomes before considering any long term actions to further address this matter.

**Proposed Timeline for Recommendations  
Short Term Actions (12-24 Months)**

KEY: Implementation  Action in place 	2020		2021				2022			
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b><i>Funding for Implementing Solutions</i></b>										
Establish "Go Green" Day Pass to Generate Revenue										
Establish a Big Sur "Sustainability Fund" to Finance Solutions										
Establish a Big Sur "Community Corps" to Help Implement Solutions										
Explore Other Funding Avenues										
<b><i>Accurate Visitor Management Data</i></b>										
Implement Visitor Count Data Collection										
Establish an Annual Traffic Count										
Establish a Process of Visitor and Resident Surveys										
<b><i>Visitor Traffic Management</i></b>										
Increase monitoring and enforcement during peak holiday periods and at "hotspots"										
Investigate and Evaluate Opportunities for Implementing Adaptive Traffic Management on Highway 1 to Improve Traffic Flow and Safety										
<b>Shuttle Services:</b> Re-institute Pfeiffer Beach Shuttle										



<b><i>Rethinking Bixby Bridge and Other Popular Visitation Areas</i></b>			
<b>Bixby Bridge:</b> Implement a 12-month pilot program at Bixby Bridge to Eliminate All Visitor Stopping and Parking on Both East and West Sides of Highway 1 Before and After the Bridge, Including Old Coast Road			
<b>Pfeiffer Beach:</b> Implement a Parking Reservations System			
<b>McWay Falls:</b> Eliminate all Parking on Highway 1 North and South of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park			
<b>McWay Falls:</b> Implement parking reservations system at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park			
<b><i>Public Restroom Availability</i></b>			
Improve Access and Provide Better Signage for Existing Restrooms			
Work with State and Federal Agencies to Ensure a Clear and Consistent Policy for Public Use			
<b><i>Addressing Trash and Litter Problems</i></b>			
Launch Big Sur Clean and Pristine Campaign			
Utilize Temporary Placement of Additional Trash Receptacles During Peak Visitation Periods			
<b><i>Back Country and Front Country Visitation Management</i></b>			
Implement VWA Pilot Back Country Self-Directed Trail Registration System to Gather Visitor Use Data			
Establish an Online Self-Registration and Permit System for the Back Country Trail Heads Accessed from the Big Sur Coast			
Restrict Front Country Overnight Dispersed Camping During Peak Wildfire Season			

<b><i>Visitor Education and Communication</i></b>			
Launch a New Visitor Education and Communication Campaign			
Strengthen Information that Distinguishes Big Sur			
<b><i>Available Community Housing</i></b>			
Expand ADUs and address STRs			

**Proposed Timeline for Recommendations  
Long Term Actions (3-5 Years)**

Key:

KEY: Implementation  Action in place

	2023				2024				2025			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b><i>Accurate Visitor Management Data</i></b>												
Compile a Comprehensive Annual Data Summary												
<b><i>Visitor Traffic Management</i></b>												
<b>Shuttle Services:</b> Establish a Big Sur North Coast Shuttle												
<b>Shuttle Services:</b> Establish a Big Sur Valley Shuttle												
<b>Shuttle Services:</b> Establish a Big Sur South Coast Shuttle												
<b><i>Rethinking Bixby Bridge and Other Popular Visitation Areas</i></b>												
<b>Bixby Bridge:</b> Re-design the Bixby Bridge visitor experience												
<b><i>Public Restroom Availability</i></b>												
Prioritize State Park identified restroom sites - Garrapata Beach, then McWay Falls, Soberanes, Partington Cove												
Consider Vista Point restrooms, if consistent with the BSLUP, north of JPB State Park, at Abalone Cove, and south of Big Creek												
Explore tax rebates and incentives for expanding restrooms												
<b><i>Addressing Trash and Litter Problems</i></b>												
Create incentives for reducing roadside trash and litter												
<b><i>Visitor Education and Communication</i></b>												
Establish a Visitor Education Facility at the North and South Ends of the Big Sur Coast												

## **Conclusion**

As has been noted throughout the DSP and in numerous other documents and publications, Big Sur is a stunning region of natural beauty that includes rare biodiversity amid mist-shrouded mountains and dramatic beaches nestled along the California coastline. For more than a century, this region has attracted visitors eager to explore and experience nature and to learn about its cultural heritage, ranging from the history of the original Indigenous People to whom Big Sur was home, to the rugged lifestyle of early settlers, to the more modern-day 'back to the landers' who flocked here in the 70s. Big Sur's reputation as a haven for contemporary artists and celebrated writers continues to draw visitors from far and near, as does marveling at feats of engineering such as Bixby Bridge.

There has always been a constructive tension between locals and visitors, stretching back more than 100 years. On the one hand, those who live in Big Sur are concerned about its popularity attracting more visitors than the infrastructure can handle; on the other hand, residents recognize the importance of visitors in supporting the local economy that many community members also depend upon for their livelihoods. This constructive pull between the positives and negatives of visitation, as discussed in detail in the preceding sections of this plan, are likely to be a permanent fixture of Big Sur for years to come, as they have been in the past. What does not have to be a permanent fixture is a lack of proper visitation planning, monitoring and management in Big Sur.

From the start, the DSP has been about finding the right balance for visitation, including putting guardrails in place to reduce and avoid negative impacts on Big Sur's environment and to help advance positive solutions to current challenges so that tourism can be managed the right way – the sustainable way – to support the protection of Big Sur's natural areas and to also benefit the local way of life. In that sense, this plan supports and calls for the principles of sustainable tourism, together with the United Nations Sustainable

Development Goals - the foundation for destination stewardship - to guide how visitation takes place in Big Sur now and in the future. The recommendations present viable solutions (the short term and long term actions outlined in this plan) that, through further community discussion and consideration of what priority actions should move forward to implementation, present a path forward to a better and brighter future for Big Sur.

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