

The Land of Big Sur

Conservation on the California Coast

BY JOHN WALTON

Of Big Sur, Henry Miller observed: “Paradise or no paradise, I have the very definite impression that the people of this vicinity are striving to live up to the grandeur and nobility which is such an integral part of this setting. They behave as if it were a privilege to live here, as if it were by an act of grace they found themselves here. The place itself is so overwhelmingly bigger, greater, than anyone could hope to make it that it engenders a humility and reverence not frequently met with in Americans. There being nothing to improve on in the surroundings, the tendency is to set about improving oneself.”¹

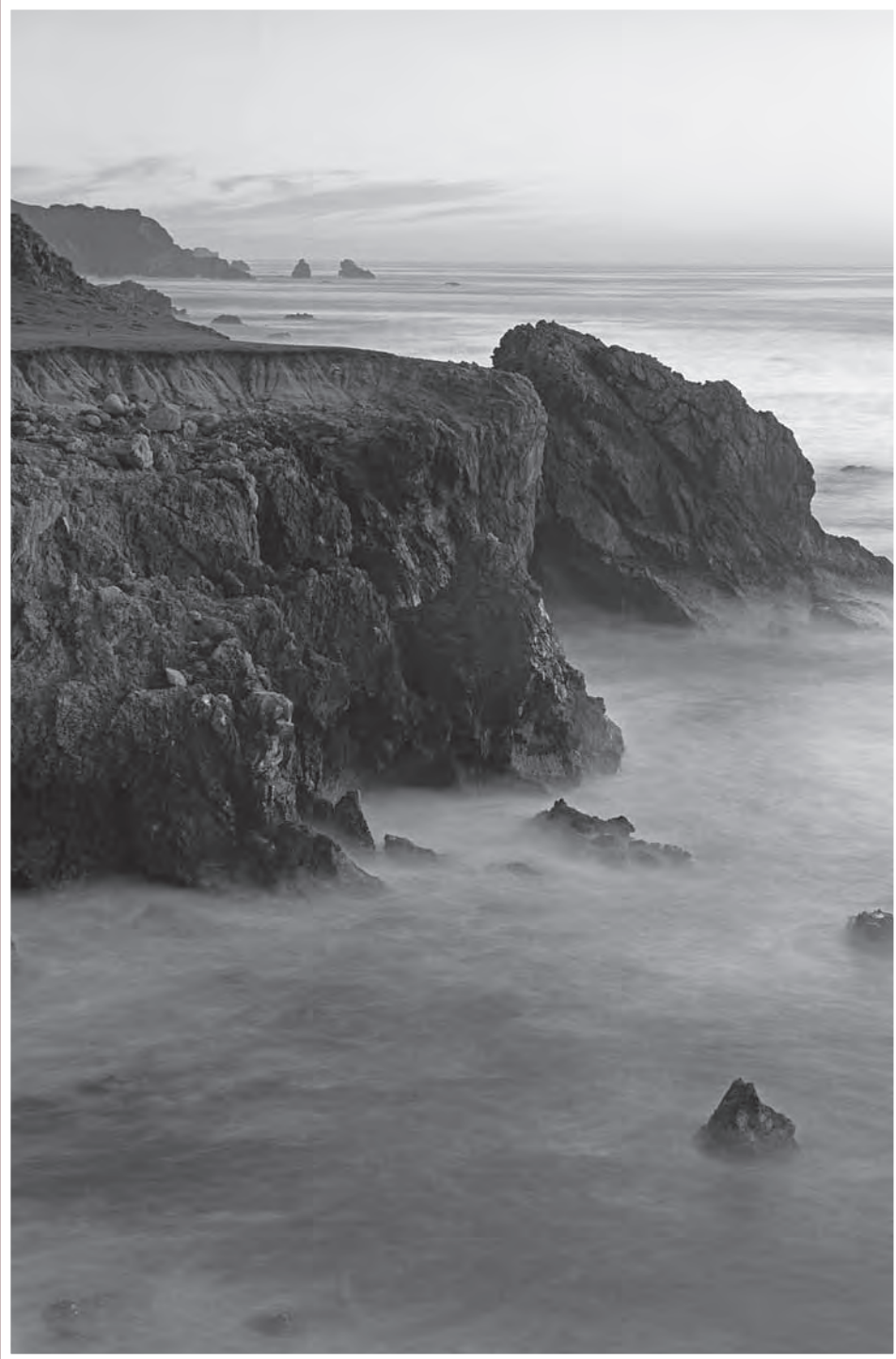
The Big Sur coast is both a natural wonder and social achievement. An area extending nearly one hundred miles along the California coast—from the Carmel River to San Simeon and inland some five or ten miles to the 5,000-foot crest of the Santa Lucia Mountains and Ventana Wilderness—few places have managed to preserve for public use thousands of scenic acres and coastline in populous regions. In years past, a series of place-names distinguished isolated pioneer settle-

ments (Point Lobos, Palo Colorado, Mill Creek, Sur, Lucia) before the more inclusive name Big Sur became customary as contact with the outside world grew. Even today some would limit the Big Sur area to the populated valley twenty-six miles south of Carmel.²

Whether about place-names or politics, few matters elicit general agreement in Big Sur. Yet residents and legions of visitors are unanimous on one point: the stunning natural beauty of the place. Robinson Jeffers, whose poetry chronicled life on the coast during the 1920s and 1930s, described Big Sur as “the noblest thing I have ever seen,” and painter Francis McComas called it “the greatest meeting of land and water in the world.” Equally remarkable, Big Sur embraces a “vibrant, alive community” of 1,500 people spread thinly over several hundred thousand acres that are protected for public enjoyment and

There are nearly one hundred miles of scenic coastline in Big Sur. Numerous parks and trails provide public access to the region's dramatic headlands and interior canyons, redwood stands, and mountains. Approximately 500,000 acres of land—extending from the Carmel River in the north to San Simeon and the San Luis Obispo County line in the south—are preserved under various federal, state, county, and private arrangements.

COURTESY OF THE BIG SUR LAND TRUST



recreational use from the kind of development (though not all development) that otherwise might destroy this special environment in ways so prevalent along the southern California coast.³

A distinctive place—“a state of mind” according to the novelist Lillian Bos Ross and a naturalist’s haven for wildlife biologists Paul Henson and Donald Usner—Big Sur is not, however, unique from the standpoint of environmental protection. In California alone major environmental achievements grace the San Francisco Bay, West Marin–Sonoma Coast and Point Reyes National Seashore north of San Francisco, the state’s 1,100-mile coastline, and the Eastern Sierra watershed. Big Sur’s environmental success, nevertheless, is particularly noteworthy. Over the last one hundred years, effective mechanisms for environmental protection have developed here, including responsible government, the environmental movement, historical tradition, creative planning, healthy conflict, and citizen participation mobilized by all of these factors.⁴

EXPLAINING ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

Explanations offered for open-space preservation in case study descriptions and academic syntheses may be divided into two broad categories. One stresses citizen activism or popular movements, from the environmental movement to campaigns to save local places. Pressed about why citizens may act in one time or place rather than another, this explanation underscores local resources (e.g., wealth, education) and opportunities (e.g., some visible threat to the environment or new mechanism for collective action), with an emphasis on grassroots mobilization. The other approach emphasizes government, public policy, or what one author calls a “policy capacity model.” Here “community civic resources” or social capital are included in the model along with the “policy system,” corresponding roughly to government fiscal and administrative abil-

ity. Of course, citizen activism and public policy are not mutually exclusive, although the two approaches do prioritize the causes of preservation in different ways. Our purpose in this essay is to evaluate these reasonable arguments in light of a study of conservation in Big Sur that may contribute to a more complete explanation.⁵

The Big Sur case study illustrates several important aspects of conservation on the Central Coast. First, the goals and methods of land preservation are the product of decades of development, fashioned in the give-and-take between local interest groups, landowners, nonprofits, and public agencies. The process begins long before modern environmentalism emerged in the 1960s, and conservation traditions established earlier continue to operate. Explanations require historical perspective. Second, through the cooperative interplay of actors—including the California State Parks Department, the California Coastal Conservancy, the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, state- and federal-designated wilderness areas and national marine sanctuaries, The Big Sur Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and private ranches under conservation easements—Big Sur has become an exemplary case of environmental protection despite, and in some ways because of, conflict within the community. Here, the “community” is not the effective unit of analysis, as in other explanations where coalitions of groups and organizations often work in the face of opposition. Big Sur is a region, rather than an incorporated town or county, composed of many environmental interests that sometimes oppose one another. Third, state support in the form of new legislated tools, oversight, and millions of dollars for land acquisition has been crucial for the success of local efforts. Fourth, conservation activists have played a critical role in these events, acting as buyers, sellers, agents, intermediaries, advocates, negotiators, and sometimes protesters. At crucial moments, land trusts

have moved between agencies and owners, sellers and buyers. This case study involves collective action through organizational networks that evolve over time.

The sheer size of Big Sur's protected area contributes to its distinction as a prototype for conservation: roughly 500,000 acres of protected land (including the northern portion of Los Padres National Forest)—even more when including Fort Hunter Liggett and the recently preserved Hearst Ranch.⁶

The story of conservation in Big Sur has been a tempestuous one, featuring pitched battles between local property owners and outsiders, among locals, and even among well-meaning environmentalists. This “battle for the wilderness”—as John Woolfenden describes the events of the 1970s and 1980s—continues to this day.⁷

A FATEFUL PAST

El Sur, “the south,” was the name Spanish colonists gave to the great expanse of rugged land along the coast below the presidial and missionary headquarters established in Monterey in 1770. Although Franciscan missionaries led by Father Junípero Serra began at once to recruit Indians to the mission settlement as laborers and Christian converts, they understood little of Native American language, culture, or group differences. The Indians living in the immediate vicinity of San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo (Carmel Mission) were of the Ohlone group (or “tribelet”), whom the missionaries indiscriminately called Costanoans. The Ohlone constituted a distinct society from the Esselen, who occupied what is today the core area of Big Sur and who, numbering perhaps 1,200, “were one of the least numerous and remain one of the least known” California Indian groups. The Esselen left stunning rock paintings in backcountry caves and struggled to maintain their independence as colonial forces surrounded them after 1770. They



This rendering of Carmel Mission, from an 1854 lithograph by Cyrille Pierre Théodore Leplace, shows the mission and portions of the San José y Sur Chiquito land grant. The open country of the Santa Lucia Mountains in the background looks much the same today and is permanently protected under a joint arrangement of the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District, the California State Parks Department, and The Nature Conservancy.

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were virtually extinguished in the nineteenth century as the result of disease and incorporation into colonial society through intermarriage and farm labor.⁸

Large tracts of land under Mexican rule in the 1830s were granted to ex-soldiers and associates of the provincial governors, three near Carmel Mission at the gateway to El Sur and another twenty miles down the coast. An early drawing of Carmel Mission shows cattle grazing on nearby hillsides of the 8,876-acre Rancho San José y Sur Chiquito grant. To the south, the 8,814-acre Rancho El Sur grant passed through several owners, including Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, finally coming into the hands of Captain John Rogers Cooper, whose family legacy is preserved today through the Andrew Molera State Park (named for Cooper's grandson). Under Cooper's management Rancho El Sur thrived from the 1840s as a cattle ranch and dairy, employing numbers of Hispanic and Indian vaqueros and supporting a school and community center. In his pioneer memoir, Sam Trotter recalled attending the “big dance Saturday night at the Cooper hall near the mouth of Big Sur [River] on the Cooper grant.”⁹

Anglo settlement of Big Sur began in the late nineteenth century in response to homestead and timber claims offered by public land laws. Michael and Barbara Pfeiffer, “of Alsatian origin,” arrived in 1869 with the first four of their children. Former Rancho El Sur vaqueros Manuel Innocenti, an Indian, and David Castro bought small farms. Many of the settlers were Yankees, such as William Brainard Post, who married Anselma Onesimo, a Costanoan-Rumsen Indian. Because Big Sur was isolated and its rugged terrain was generally inhospitable to the Mexican hacienda, a good deal of coastal land was available for distribution under homestead and timber claims. In the fall of 1893, Sam Trotter left his employment as a woodsman in the Santa Cruz Mountains and headed south to Big Sur with three friends, two pack mules, and one ambition. As he recalled years later, one of his compan-

ions, “Mr. Wm. Notley told me he had a letter from a Mr. I. N. Swetman that there was some good timber land in the north fork of Little [Sur] River . . . and that there were some very good claims belonging to the government yet not taken up. He [Notley] wanted to know if I wanted to go down with him, look it over and if it was good timber we could each take up a claim.” Through preemption, homesteading, timber claims, sales, and squatting, a growing number of settlers in the 1870s and 1880s acquired small farms. Mexican land grants were recognized after statehood, and designated government land moved from public ownership to small holdings (successfully patented homesteads and timber claims), some of which were subsequently consolidated in family holdings and by resale in ranches of a thousand acres or more.¹⁰

In 1879, the voter registration roll for Sur Precinct listed twenty-six men, all identified as farmers save two stock raisers, two laborers, one lumberman, and one miner. By 1896 there were sixty-two voters (all male until 1920), agrarians to a man except the lighthouse keeper and an engineer. The U.S. Census of Agricultural Production for Monterey County in 1880 lists only a handful of farmers on the coast, suggesting the others were subsistence farmers with no measurable production for the market. Michael Pfeiffer’s farm included more than 500 acres, twelve of which were tilled, 200 cows and pigs, and a yearly income of \$1,100, mostly from butter production, but no paid labor, owing perhaps to a family that grew to eight children and succeeding generations. Kentuckian Thomas Ingram produced \$1,500 worth of cattle and butter on his 400-acre ranch and paid \$300 for hired labor in 1879. Charles Bixby, whose principal business was timber, owned a profitable ranch on Mill (later Bixby) Creek valued at more than \$4,000 and paid \$800 in wages. Bixby built a ship’s landing for export from his sawmill and employed ranch and mill workers in the



Notley's Landing was one of a series of “dog hole” ports used to export timber, tanbark, and lime for several decades around the turn of the century. Operated by brothers William and Godfrey Notley, the landing and mill also served as a community center for residents of the Palo Colorado area, hosting picnics and dances.

COURTESY OF PAT HATHAWAY, CALIFORNIA VIEWS; PHOTOGRAPH BY L. S. SLEVIN

construction of the first wagon road linked to Monterey. By 1900, the U.S. Manuscript Census recorded 331 persons living in ninety-five households in the section of Monterey Township from the Carmel River to the San Luis Obispo County line. Society consisted in large part of pioneering farmers and loggers living in isolated settlements surrounded by natural beauty, economic austerity, and ambivalence toward outsiders, which, combined, kept the area relatively unspoiled.¹¹

Change began at the turn of the century. Agricultural production on family farms remained the staple of the economy, specializing in dairy, livestock, and honey, while gold, lime, and coal mining had short-lived successes. The more sustained industry was lumber, principally redwood and tanbark stripped from oak trees. Forest products were exported from a series of landings (Notley's, Bixby's, Partington), or "dog hole" ports along the coast, and carried to Monterey and San Francisco by regular steamship service. Like mining, however, timber and tanbark faltered as economically accessible supplies were exhausted. The industry of the future began to emerge when campers and sports enthusiasts appeared in growing numbers on the regular stagecoach run and in new outdoor resorts (Idlewild, Pfeiffer's). Wealthy individuals bought some of the cattle ranches to operate more for enjoyment than for subsistence.

Big Sur's legendary bohemian community formed in the new century as the scenery, cheap living, and one another's company drew poets, artists, writers, and sundry eccentrics. The treacherous coast road, another factor in the area's isolation, was steadily improved, allowing automobile traffic as far as Cooper's ranch in the 1920s and, with a final assist from the Works Progress Administration, to San Simeon in 1937. Although the shift from pioneer era to modern service economy came gradually, 1937 was the watershed year and Highway 1, the main coastal thoroughfare, the decisive agent of change.

Regional identity shifted from many local settlements to a more inclusive Big Sur defined from outside the area. Developers, county officials, and those working in the tourist industry hailed the progress, while poets such as Robinson Jeffers abhorred it: "Rock-narrowed farms in poverty and freedom is a good life. . . . At the far end of those loops of road is what will come and destroy it, a rich and vulgar and bewildered civilization dying at the core." The ensuing tension among the social groups would become a permanent characteristic of the region.¹²

STEWARDS OF THE LAND

Land preservation on the Central Coast began with the creation of the U.S. Forest Service in 1905 and the establishment of the Monterey Forest Preserve in 1906. The preserve was expanded in 1908 to include tracts in other counties and was linked to the Santa Barbara National Forest in 1919. In 1936 all two million acres were renamed Los Padres National Forest. In the 1860s, California senator and newspaper owner George Hearst had begun buying old land grants on the south coast near present-day San Simeon, eventually consolidating a quarter-million acres in the Hearst family ranch. His son, William Randolph, inherited the property and built a castle there, which he called "the ranch," but reluctantly sold large northern sections of the property to the federal government when facing bankruptcy in the late 1930s. The sale helped to create the 175,000-acre Hunter Liggett Military Reservation and to expand Los Padres National Forest. Sixty thousand acres were added to the forest through a land swap with the Bureau of Land Management in 1935, when unclaimed public lands were closed with the repeal of the Homestead Act. The Big Sur portion of the Los Padres National Forest, 340,000 acres, is the only national forest on the Pacific Coast.¹³



Aerial view of Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument, San Luis Obispo County, ca. 1920s. *Forming the southern boundary of Big Sur, currently the ranch acquired by Senator George Hearst in the 1860s covers 82,000 acres. Several hundred acres of the monument's showcase "castle" and gardens, built by William Randolph Hearst in the 1920s, are now operated by the California State Parks Department. In recent years an \$80 million plan was negotiated between the state, the Hearst Corporation, and the American Land Conservancy that will protect the property as a working ranch, provide public coastal access, and allow limited housing development. The agreement has critics and defenders.*

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Preservation in Big Sur evolved through a set of practices typically involving the collaboration of public and private entities. Initially the movement was from public to private ownership as the U.S. government (and Mexico previously) subsidized western development by awarding cheap public land to those who would settle and improve family-size holdings. By the 1930s, however, movement in the other direction began along the Central Coast. In 1933, members of the pioneering Pfeiffer family decided they wanted to preserve portions of Big Sur Valley, where many of their second- and third-generation family members lived and operated a resort. William Colby, a Big Sur resident and

the second president (after John Muir) of the Sierra Club, encouraged the Pfeiffers to sell 500 acres at below-market price to the state parks system, leading to the creation (after several name changes) of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. In the same year, "the crown jewel of the California Park System" was created when the heirs of Alexander Allen sold 1,300 acres on Carmel Bay to the Point Lobos State Reserve. Allen had prospered building race tracks and used his wealth to preserve the point, buying 640 acres from a bankrupt coal company in 1898 and eventually supplanting a stone quarry, abalone cannery, and two proposed town developments (Carmelito in 1878 and Point Lobos City in 1890) on the site.¹⁴

The Big Sur tradition of returning the land to the public realm for protection and common use is inspired by the beauty and enjoyment of the landscape, according to testimony of donors. The pattern is striking and continues to the present. In 1968, the Molera family sold 2,200 acres of the original Cooper land grant to The Nature Conservancy, which held the beachfront property until the state could finance its purchase for the Andrew Molera State Park. An additional 2,400 acres east of Highway 1 were soon incorporated into the park, extending from the longest beach in Big Sur to the scenic headlands. In 1978, the 3,548-acre Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve (part of the historic Gamboa Ranch) was added to the University of California Natural Reserve System through the concerted effort of The Nature Conservancy, Save-the-Redwoods League, and the UC Board of Regents. And in 2002, the U.S. Forest Service bought the 1,200-acre Brazil Ranch overlooking Bixby Bridge. These transfers alone restored some 15,000 acres to the public domain in preserves devoted to recreation and research without pre-empting space devoted to community uses. Indeed, the new parks attract tourists to local businesses and provide meeting places for community groups, including ones that meet to oppose public land acquisitions. Although the



Pfeiffer's Resort in the Big Sur Valley operated from 1908 to 1935 as one of the best-known tourist destinations, if not the first, as well as the local post office. Florence (Swetnam) Pfeiffer ran the resort with her husband, John, and hosted frequent visitors, including the poet Robinson Jeffers and his wife, Una. The family later donated land for the Pfeiffer Redwoods State Park, a central feature of the valley today.

COURTESY OF PAT HATHAWAY, CALIFORNIA VIEWS; PHOTOGRAPH BY LEWIS JOSSELYN

Brazil Ranch was sold to a government agency for want of a private buyer, the sale rekindled objections from the Coast Property Owners Association (CPOA) of Big Sur that claimed “if things keep going the way things are going, Big Sur will be a national park.”¹⁵

FROM PLAN TO CONFLICT

Contention has always characterized Big Sur. Early settlers helped one another, built local schools, and attended community picnics and dances. But these pioneers of nostalgic memory also quarreled over property lines, broke fences, and poisoned and maimed animals in acts of revenge. They struggled to make the hardscrabble land pay, sold out, moved on, and left the prosperous few to consolidate larger holdings. Some had no use for “civilization,” although many welcomed the mail carrier, telephone, and county road. Civilization was a compromise. Improved roads made it easier to get to town with farm

produce and brought cash-paying customers to the first lodges and campgrounds, but it also brought wealthy investors, bohemian artists, and land speculators. This was the origin of Big Sur’s division of social class and culture—functional and artistic, rural and urban, local and cosmopolitan, rich and poor—that persists today between affluent, coast-view homeowners and tourist industry and state and county government service workers.¹⁶

Prior to 1960 the role of government in Big Sur was minimal, devoted to maintaining roads, public lands, schools, and law enforcement. As early as 1930, environmental concerns brought about ordinances preventing billboards along the scenic highway, establishing a zoning precedent. In the late 1950s, the Monterey County Planning Commission decided to develop a master plan to provide guidelines for anticipated growth. During these years preceding the environmental movement, public concern centered on preserving Big Sur’s rural character, balancing commercial and

agricultural interests, and entertaining tourists while limiting their impact on the landscape. The county hired the prominent San Francisco architecture and planning firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to conduct a study of the problem. The choice of firms revealed an interesting local connection: Nathaniel Owings and his conservationist wife, Margaret, owned property in Big Sur and the firm was associated with Monterey architects Hall and Goodhue. Owings was something of a visionary who believed that architecture should serve humanity and respect the natural world. He was rich, famous (for his firm's Crown Zellerbach Building in San Francisco and the redesign of Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House), influential, and, with Margaret, actively involved in preserving Big Sur's character.¹⁷

In August 1961 the (Owings) Coast Master Plan proposed a radical new vision for Big Sur, identifying preservation of the bountiful landscape as the principal goal and recommending that future growth be controlled in a manner that was harmonious with the natural setting. Highway 1 would remain a two-lane scenic road. New housing would be clustered to retain as much open space as possible. Concern was born for the "viewshed"—the landscape visible from Highway 1, unblemished by any new construction—as an object of preservation. All these objectives, moreover, would be implemented without turning the land over to any governmental agency, although the plan did call for expansion of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park by an impressive 5,000 acres. The key provision, however, and what laid the ground for the central controversy that followed, set density requirements for future building at one house per ten acres along the shore and one house per twenty acres on land east of the highway. A system of transferable credits would allow more building in sheltered mountain areas for those contributing to open space on the coast. The plan included something for nearly everyone and something objectionable to most.¹⁸

Neighbors divided, old timers and newcomers split ranks. Anti-government forces liked the provision limiting agency involvement, while conservationists embraced park expansion and the plan's lofty general theme. Preservationists brought heavy political and cultural capital to the controversy. Nat Owings's friend Nicholas Roosevelt (Teddy's nephew), who lived on Partington Ridge, ten miles south of Big Sur Valley, lent his family pedigree in a supportive special issue of the *Monterey Peninsula Herald*. Legends of the coast came forward with endorsements: pioneers Joseph William Post and Hans and Esther Pfeiffer Ewoldsen, popular sculptor Harry Dick Ross, photographer Ansel Adams, Samuel Hopkins (descendant of California's famous Southern Pacific Railroad family), and William Colby of the Sierra Club. Cortlandt Hill, another railroad heir who in the 1950s had purchased 7,000 acres of the old Cooper ranch, favored everything but the state park expansion. The most vocal opposition focused on the density provision. Real estate interests in Carmel Highlands claimed that a standard of one house per ten acres would prevent potential development of available parcels, thus amounting to confiscation. Rancher James Doud, who owned 5,000 acres along the coast, claimed he would lose \$1.5 million in potential subdivision sales. Owings was accused of (and denied) profiting from development credits. More than one hundred exercised residents (pro and con) turned out for public hearings at the Big Sur Grange Hall and county offices in Salinas.¹⁹

Eventually a compromise was reached. Many residents liked something about the plan, motivating conservation and development interests to negotiate. Expansion of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park was dropped in favor of a recommendation for a series of smaller parks along the coast. The two-lane scenic Highway 1 would remain unchanged. Other provisions for clustering buildings and preserving open space were "encouraged" rather than required. The big concession from planners was the significant reduction of the density

requirement from one house per ten- and twenty-acre parcels to one living unit per acre in tourist areas, one per two and a half acres west of the highway and one per five acres east of the highway in areas closer to Carmel, one per two and a half acres in established communities (e.g., Palo Colorado and Big Sur Valley), and a somewhat more restrictive standard (five- and ten-acre home sites) farther south. The coastal area between Little Sur and Big Sur rivers (Hill's El Sur Ranch) was designated for special treatment determined through presentation of development plans and individual study. Former opponents cheered the report, which was soon adopted by county supervisors. The Owings group gracefully accepted a deal far short of their ambitions.²⁰

Finalized in 1962, the Coast Master Plan proved an important long-term victory for conservationists. Both the county and the local community now were formally committed to limits on growth. The viewshed as an object acquired a new salience. Protection of the natural landscape was established as the guiding principle of development a full decade before similar standards would be applied statewide in the Coastal Initiative. Big Sur was developing a new kind of environmental awareness in tandem with a few other leading areas like West Marin.²¹

THE POLITICS OF PROTECTION

The 1970s witnessed an awakening of interest in the environment regionally and nationally on a par with the creation of national parks and public land stewardship at the turn of the twentieth century. Earth Day in 1970 launched an environmental movement that penetrated the national consciousness. The popular movement led to passage in the same year of the National Environmental Policy Act and its state equivalent, the California Environmental Quality Act. These laws set new standards for clean air and water, hazardous waste disposal, protection of the land

and sea, endangered species, and procedures for evaluating new development with environmental impact reports. The movement and subsequent legislation responded to a perception of growing threats to the environment and public health: the familiar mix of urban sprawl, toxic contamination of rivers and groundwater, smog, clear-cutting forests, depletion of fisheries, oil spills from offshore drilling. For a time, at least, the public demanded protection.

Concern for the degradation of California's coastline also took political shape around 1970 as signs of despoliation along the coast multiplied. The population of southern California's coastal counties had doubled in the previous decade. Unregulated and often unsightly building along the coast destroyed ocean views and restricted public access to beaches. Water quality and wildlife were palpably threatened; species vanished and lagoons were polluted with sewage and toxic runoff. Shabby development was most extensive in San Diego, Santa Monica, Malibu, and Ventura but was heading inexorably north. Sea Ranch, a projected development of 5,200 vacation and second homes in Sonoma County, threatened to eliminate public access to ten miles of scenic coastline until an alliance of environmentalists prevailed on developers to redesign the project. A textbook case was the building of a freestanding, multistoried hotel on the bay in Monterey by Holiday Inn, considered by some both an eyesore and a harbinger of "Miami Beachization."²²

In 1972 the campaign for Proposition 20, the Coastal Initiative, was led by a coalition of environmentalists under the banner "Save Our Coast." Opposing corporate and development interests (Southern Pacific Land Company, Standard Oil, Pacific Gas and Electric, Mobil Oil, Gulf Oil, Texaco, General Electric, Southern California Edison, and a number of land companies) concentrated their efforts on mass media advertising, outspending proponents six to one. Misleading ads intoned "Conservation Yes, Confiscation No."

In the early 1970s, a hotel built originally by Holiday Inn provoked defenders of a public coastline and contributed to the success of the 1972 Coastal Initiative. The hotel was considered an eyesore and inappropriate use of the shoreline where constructions are threatened by tidal erosion. Under the California Coastal Act of 1976 projects of this kind probably would be prohibited. Efforts are now under way to extend public protection and use to much of the Monterey Bay shoreline.

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Indeed, corporate heavy-handedness became an issue in the media campaign. The initiative's supporters effectively claimed popular sympathy through neighborhood leafleting, personal campaigning by senior citizens and Sierra Club youth, and folksy published appeals from Carmel artist Hank Ketcham's Dennis the Menace.²³

Support for the initiative was especially vigorous in Monterey County, where a large Sierra Club chapter mobilized the petition drive to place the measure on the ballot. Ansel Adams, the renowned photographer who worked out of a Carmel Highlands studio, contributed images to the publicity campaign. Local fears of coastal ruin were aroused by offshore oil drilling in the Santa Barbara Channel, a proposed refinery at nearby Moss Landing, and the new Holiday Inn. Monterey was a microcosm of activist support for the Coastal Initiative. The petition drive garnered more than 9,000 local signatures. When the proposition won a solid statewide victory in the November 1972 election, matching Richard Nixon's 55 percent majority, Monterey County's votes were high, with 58 percent in favor.

After much delay and compromise, the California Coastal Act passed the legislature in 1976, establishing the California Coastal Commission as formal machinery to meet legislative require-

ments. The commission works in partnership with oceanfront counties and city governments, setting standards for new construction, public access, protection of marine life and coastal wildlife, restoration of sensitive habitats, and protection of scenic beauty. The teeth of the Coastal Act are its powers to review, deny, and refer back to local developers and governments projects it judges in violation of environmental standards. Critics believe that the commission's organizational operation has lost the enthusiasm that once fueled the reform movement and has become vulnerable to political influence. Although the commission's fortunes rise and fall with successive state administrations (generally on a supportive Democrat and grudging Republican cycle), for more than thirty years it has been a contending force in environmental politics, preventing numerous massive building projects and noxious industrial developments and ensuring expanded public use of beaches. Travelers familiar with Miami, Malibu, Spain's Costa del Sol, or England's southern shore are impressed with what they see in northern California. Nevertheless, environmental critics argue that much has slipped past the commission's oversight, citing unrelenting pressures from developers and new environmental threats unanticipated at the time of the original legislation.²⁴

The Coastal Act also provided for community-level participation, recognizing local planning districts and delegating to them land-use decisions subject to the commission's review. Local authority, however, required that the planning districts (Local Coastal Program, or LCP) develop a plan (Land Use Plan, or LUP) adopted by the appropriate unit of local government (town, county) and then certified by the commission. The Big Sur planning district was defined geographically as that area of Monterey County from Mal Paso Creek in Carmel Highlands south to the San Luis Obispo County line and from the ocean to the crest of the Santa Lucia Mountains—a 72-mile coastal strip comprising 1,500 people, 150,000 acres (75,000 national forest, 55,000 private, 9,000 state parks, and the balance state and regional special preservation districts), and some of the nation's most dramatic scenery. The Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC), liaising between Big Sur residents and members of the LCP, was charged with drafting the LUP.²⁵

The conflict reached its apogee in the late 1970s as community representatives formulated an LCP to address Big Sur residents' concerns that the commission would impose regulations adverse to local interests and threaten the fragile consensus that had been reached since passage of the 1962 Coast Master Plan. Monterey County began its LCP by working through the CAC and seeking local input on a new document that would supersede the Coast Master Plan, and that, once approved by the commission, would become the governing authority for land-use decisions. The policy debate, though vigorous and contentious, was also a local discussion premised on revising the Coast Master Plan in view of the new Coastal Act and aimed at establishing a new set of rules for local control.²⁶

“FEDERALIZATION” VS. LOCAL AUTONOMY

The political storm over Big Sur broke in April 1980 when Senator Alan Cranston proposed a bill (S2551) that would appropriate \$100 million for land acquisition on the Big Sur coast over a ten-year period to form the nation's first national scenic area. Local sentiments erupted. Here was evidence of a planned federal takeover of the community. Outsiders were behind the scheme. For several years a group called the Big Sur Foundation had been meeting at the home of Ansel Adams, who had photographed President Jimmy Carter in the White House and was thought to have the ear of politicians from the White House to Monterey. He also garnered support from the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society to create a national park in Big Sur resembling his beloved Yosemite. The Big Sur Foundation had no presence in Big Sur proper. Locals organized by Gary Koepfel—publisher of the *Big Sur Gazette*, a bimonthly newspaper launched in 1978 and devoted to local autonomy—and James Josoff's Friends of the Big Sur Coast perceived it as an alien, elitist menace. The Big Sur community mounted a campaign against Adams, Cranston, and their planned “federalization.” Local citizens took their case to Washington and enlisted Cranston's nemesis, Senator S. I. Hayakawa of California, to oppose the bill.

As it turned out, the Cranston bill enjoyed little public support outside the environmental lobby. After mostly negative Senate testimony, it was shelved. The real difficulties came in the aftermath of Cranston's legislation, when Representative Leon Panetta introduced an alternative measure in the House of Representatives (HR 7380) in 1981 outlining a much different approach. The Panetta plan did not create a national park but proposed a preservationist alliance headed by the U.S. secretary of agriculture (the administrative head of the U.S. Forest Service), who would share power with a council of local officials and residents, all bound by a



Senator Alan Cranston's proposal for a \$100 million national scenic area accelerated the conflict among federal, state, and local interests. A photograph in the April 1980 issue of the *Big Sur Gazette* documented a rare meeting of opposing sides at Nepenthe: (left to right) Will Shaw, architect and founder and president of Big Sur Foundation (at far left, hidden); Ansel Adams, photographer and vice president of Big Sur Foundation; Leon Panetta, congressman; Roger Newell, Big Sur resident and Citizens' Advisory Committee member; Saunders Hillyer, director of the Big Sur Foundation; James Josoff, president of Friends of the Big Sur Coast; Ron Tipton, Wilderness Society representative; Charles Cushman, executive director of the American Land Rights Association, formerly the National Inholders Association; and Stanley Diamond, representative for Senator S. I. Hayakawa.

COURTESY ANITA ALAN; PHOTOGRAPH BY PAULA WALLING

master plan incorporating the Big Sur LCP. Final authority would rest with the federal agency, thus skirting the Coastal Commission. Preservationists argued that the commission would be subject to shifting political winds while the federal environmental commitment was steadfast—an open question, as time would show. For better or worse, the local resistance movement would hear none of it. They distrusted their political representatives. Successive issues of the *Big Sur Gazette* called Panetta's bill a "counterfeit" claiming to give local authority while intending federal domination. There was some truth in the charge. In fact, Panetta's formula for interagency collaboration had been modified in Representative Phil Burton's parks committee, which redrafted the final version and shifted power upwards. Although the bill passed the House, it died in the Senate, thanks again to Hayakawa, who blocked a vote before adjournment.

The Cranston-Panetta legislative battle left bitter feelings. Positions hardened. Local residents considered themselves the true stewards of the land and accused outsiders of wanting to stifle

growth and expropriate property for federal occupation. Conservationists, including some Big Sur residents, said the resistance movement fronted for developers and indulged a conspiracy theory of the political process. These positions, though extreme, poisoned relations between local groups and delayed negotiations on a new LCP that would authorize mechanisms of local control—the exact solution preferred by both sides.

An irony permeates Big Sur. At bottom, opposing groups agree on most fundamentals yet cast one another as enemies. In 1984, Alisa Fineman, a student at the University of California, Santa Cruz, conducted a perceptive study as her senior thesis, interviewing forty Big Sur residents on both sides of the federal legislation question. Regulation opponents and Friends of the Big Sur Coast expressed their belief that property owners were effective stewards; that local government was adequate to the task of environmental protection; and that federal management would destroy rather than preserve Big Sur's unique social and physical ecology. Supporters of stronger protections asserted that growth and development

(including existing plans for massive hotels) posed a threat. They favored the Panetta approach—federal, state, county, and citizen planning collaboration to counter lax local stewardship and apathetic residents who rallied only at times of crisis—over the Cranston bill. Their logic argued that a stronger local land-use plan was precisely the best defense against federal intervention. In fact, no one favored federalization. Everyone agreed that preserving the landscape was a key to Big Sur’s economic and cultural survival. Summarizing the controversy, the *Monterey Herald* headlined “Goal of Big Sur Preservation Agreed by All—Only the Methods Disputed.” The conflict had the paradoxical effect of mobilizing people and clarifying issues in ways that would help them break through the impasse.²⁷

THE BIG SUR LAND TRUST: ONE MODEL OF PRESERVATION

In the late 1970s, a small group of environmentalists who had met initially as participants in the Citizens’ Advisory Committee to the county planning process decided to form their own organization. They were looking for new ways to promote environmental protection that were compatible with the standards set by the Coast Master Plan and the Coastal Commission. How, they asked, could Big Sur’s natural beauty be protected “from overdevelopment without recourse to government control while recognizing the right of property owners to sell to whomever they wish (other private parties, nonprofit organizations, or public agencies)?” Their question was answered in 1977 at a meeting at the home of Nancy and Sam Hopkins during which planner Gordon Hall (a Coast Master Plan consultant) made a presentation about land trusts. Afterward, the group, including Zad Leavy, Roger Newell, Sherna Stewart, and Lloyd Addelman, journeyed to the San Francisco headquarters of The Trust for Public Land for a short course in land-trust finance and management. This, they all agreed, was the vehi-

cle they had been looking for. In February 1978 they established The Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the state of California, with gifts of the \$1,250 filing fee from Peter Harding, another member of the initial group, and an undivided half-interest in twenty-four acres just north of the Esalen Institute from its co-founder Michael Murphy.²⁸

The preservationist model adopted by BSLT follows a venerable American tradition. In the nineteenth century, village improvement societies were formed in New England as nonprofit organizations to protect public spaces. The village commons and common fields provided traditional precedents of public land use in England and Spanish America. The first land trusts in the United States that built on this legacy were the Massachusetts Trustees of Reservations, founded in 1891, and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, established a decade later. By 1950, there were fifty-three land trusts operating in twenty-six states. Currently there are more than 2,000 land trusts, some organized as local affiliates of large national associations, such as the Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy, and others as independent regional trusts, such as BSLT. Within this national movement, BSLT ranks in reputation with notable trusts in Washington’s San Juan Islands, Wyoming’s Jackson Hole, New York’s Adirondacks, and Maine’s Acadia National Park.

The Land Trust Alliance, which represents more than 1,600 land trusts across the country, defines a land trust as “a nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting direct land transactions—primarily the purchase or acceptance of donations of land or conservation easements.” A conservation easement (or scenic easement) is further defined as “a legal agreement that permanently restricts the development and use of land to ensure protection of its conservation values.” The economic incentive for

owners to negotiate conservation easements is tax relief. As is the case with charitable gifts, the landowner who donates permanent developmental restrictions may deduct from income taxes an amount calculated by subtracting the value of the property with restrictions from the fair market value of the property. The one-time-only income tax benefit is enhanced by a continuing property tax reduction. A nonprofit land trust is the necessary intermediary for these arrangements.²⁹

Land trusts do four things: (1) purchase land for preservation, (2) acquire land through donations, (3) secure conservation easements on land and monitor the terms of these agreements, and (4) work in partnership with private and governmental conservation agencies. These basic functions involve a variety of related activities. According to the donor's wish, land may be retained in fee title by the trust (as a preserve, for example) or transferred to some other public (county or state park) or private (foundation) organization. Lands that are held must be maintained and therefore require that the land trust raise funds and make provisions for stewardship. Another essential task requiring staff and budget involves supervising conformity with the conditions of conservation easements. In its thirty-year history, BSLT has protected more than 30,000 acres of coastal land in a hundred separate transactions.

Several remarkable properties illustrate the variety of methods and partnerships in BSLT's work. The trust holds title to relatively few properties. The headlands above Palo Colorado Canyon include the 900-acre Glen Deven Ranch, deeded by the family of Dr. Seeley and Virginia Mudd to the trust for public educational uses. The 1,100-acre Arthur and Harriet Mitteldorf Preserve in Carmel Valley was purchased by the namesake couple for public use under BSLT management. More typically, BSLT negotiates purchases of properties for eventual transfer to the state or county parks systems. The trust saved Point

Lobos Ranch, just east of the original state park, from a proposed hotel resort development, and 1,300 acres were added to the park in a complicated transaction whereby BSLT guaranteed the private sellers a ten-year mortgage as state funds from the 1990 Wildlife Protection Act (Proposition 117) became available on a year-to-year basis.

According to Zad Leavy, the trust's longtime executive director, BSLT pioneered the "conservation buyer" method in 1989, when Hewlett-Packard co-founder David Packard purchased a 3,000-acre portion of the south coast Gamboa Ranch (the other half went to the University of California's Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve) at a reduced price predicated on an agreement not to develop the property beyond its ranch character. By agreeing to the deal, the sellers (a New York law firm that acquired the property in a foreclosure sale) were able to claim a large "loss" from market value and tax deduction. Coming at the height of controversy over the Coastal Commission, the purchase was hotly contested by some local business owners. Although threatened lawsuits never materialized, hostility toward BSLT developed in the local Coast Property Owners Association (CPOA) and the closely associated *Big Sur Gazette*. The *Gazette* accused Leavy of a conflict of interest in his roles as Coastal Commission member and BSLT's legal adviser and charged BSLT with following deceptive practices in the land deal, conducting a campaign to eliminate private property in the region, and "federalizing" ownership in one inclusive preserve—charges the trust rejected with the observation that it dealt only with willing sellers, many of whom placed easements on property that remained in private hands. The BSLT-CPOA conflict has become part of the political landscape, although the constituencies of each group do share common goals and on some occasions actually have joined forces.³⁰



Point Lobos State Reserve on Carmel Bay was established in 1933 and expanded several times to include the underwater coastal perimeter and extensive adjacent land east of the Coast Highway. Point Lobos was once slated for development as the suburban village of Carmelito and later the proposed site of a hotel complex. In its natural state it forms what the painter Francis McComas called “the greatest meeting of land and water in the world.”

COURTESY, CALIFORNIA HISTORY ROOM, MONTEREY PUBLIC LIBRARY

In the midst of the controversies over development in Big Sur, a variety of other organizations moved toward protecting land. In 1970, a group of Sierra Club members organized the Committee for Open Space. Earl Moser, a retired oil company executive who led the earlier Citizens for Clean Air campaign to stop construction of a refinery at Moss Landing on Monterey Bay, chaired the new grassroots effort. The committee acquired 5,000 signatures to place Measure A on the November 1971 ballot, successfully creating the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (MPRPD). Permanently funded by a small property tax assessment, the district has acquired a number of grants, which, when combined, provide for the purchase and maintenance of parklands. MPRPD currently manages 5,500 acres, including the heavily used 3,374-acre Garland Ranch Regional Park in Carmel Valley (gifted by the late William Garland in 1975) and the 1,340-acre Mill Creek Preserve in the heart of Big Sur. Apropos of the regional environmental network, Earl Moser later became president of BSLT and the trust's Zad Leavy served on the MPRPD Board.³¹

At the same time, the state's park system was expanding its nearly 15,000-acre recreational lands in the region. Point Lobos State Reserve more than doubled its size with the purchase of 1,700 acres on the adjacent east side of Highway 1. Facilitated by BSLT, the action stopped new hotel development plans. In 1985, the California Department of Parks and Recreation opened Garrapata State Park on the northern Big Sur coast. The park's 2,879 acres span both sides of Highway 1 near Palo Colorado, a favorite hiking venue. The Monterey/Carmel/Big Sur region counts at least a dozen environmental organizations, public and private, with overlapping memberships and interorganizational connections. Some, like the Ventana Wilderness Alliance, are devoted to maintaining public lands. Many land-saving initiatives follow a pattern of collaborative action involving private owners, state and regional governments,

nonprofit organizations, and citizens' committees. Organizational density and interconnection define the local environmental coalition.³²

EL SUR RANCH: A CASE IN POINT

Events surrounding the development of El Sur Ranch during the 1980s and 1990s shaped conservation policy on the Central Coast in decisive ways. In one sense, the importance of El Sur is obvious. When the Cooper ranch (including the original 9,000-acre Rancho El Sur grant plus nearly 3,000 acres of resale homestead land) was divided in the 1950s, the southern 4,800 acres became the Molera Ranch (and later state park) and the northern 7,100 acres formed El Sur (Hill) Ranch. Comprising six miles along the coast highway between Little Sur River and Molera Beach, where the Big Sur River enters the ocean, El Sur Ranch offers some of the coast's most striking scenery. Within its boundaries—12 percent of Big Sur's privately held land—are long stretches of beach, rolling hills and pastures, tablelands that slope to the shoreline, Point Sur promontory and lighthouse, and the gateway to Big Sur Valley. Nowhere is the coastal panorama more fully displayed. But El Sur Ranch is also important as the object of fundamental, decades-old policy decisions that continue to affect land-use practice on California's coast.³³

Courtland Hill, grandson of James J. Hill, founder of the Great Northern Railway, purchased Rancho El Sur in the 1950s. Later he passed it on to his son and, by 1980, to his grandson, James J. Hill III. As a student at California Polytechnic State University, the younger James, facing inheritance and property taxes in excess of his cash reserves, employed the San Francisco architectural firm Whisler-Patri to design a plan for developing the property that would keep it undivided and devoted to cattle ranching. The plan covered a mere 2 percent of ranch land but included a 200-room hotel, conference center, restaurant, and campground with 200 rustic cabins.

When Hill's resort development plan was announced to the press in spring 1981, designer Piero Patri made it clear that it had not been submitted for approval of the required permits: "We are really only presenting this today as a response to the LCP process." It soon became clear that several strategies were in play. Hill had approached the Coastal Conservancy, a land-preserving adjunct of the California Coastal Commission, with a proposal for generating income and tax savings. In August 1983, the conservancy agreed to pay \$1 million for a conservation easement on 1,400 acres on the east side of the highway south of Little Sur River and the outright purchase of another 1,200 acres. Hill also agreed to donate 1,100 acres of conservation easement, which would offset a portion of his capital gains tax on the \$1 million sale. The transaction was businesslike. The state gained the conservation of 3,700 splendid acres, 1,200 in public ownership. Yet Hill also benefited. The El Sur Ranch Agricultural Preservation and Resource Enhancement Plan, as the conservancy-approved agreement was called, included the hefty tax credit, return of 250 acres from Molera Park to El Sur Ranch to "minimize visitor intrusion," and retention of development rights for the hotel, restaurant, and residential sites on 3,400 unaffected acres of the ranch.³⁴

Within a year, Hill's development plan reappeared in the form of a new proposal submitted to the Monterey County Planning Department. The plan now included a 100-room hotel in three or four buildings plus a 200-seat restaurant, both on the west side of Highway 1; ninety-eight homes outside the viewshed, sale of land, and easements on some 3,000 acres; and a guarantee that these development rights could be exercised at any time over the next twenty-five years. Although a privately commissioned environmental impact report listed twenty-three potential negative impacts and the county staff expressed reservations, the Monterey County Board of

Supervisors approved the plan in late 1984.³⁵

Public reaction was immediate, vocal, and overwhelmingly hostile. The Big Sur community protested both the size of the development and the special treatment accorded Hill. The project was called "an alien intrusion which opens the door to large-scale, corporate-style resort developments . . . totally irresponsible and destructive in a fragile environment [which has] a long-standing commitment to preservation." Others alleged that the Big Sur LCP, which limits hotels outside rural service centers to thirty units and encourages rural, family-style, local ownership and operation, was treating Hill preferentially. Fortunately for the opposition, the development plan still required Coastal Commission approval. Fifty protesting Big Sur residents attended commission hearings on the project in April 1985. Deviating from its standard nonpolitical position, BSLT joined local residents in opposition. After hearing the testimony, "the Coastal Commission delivered a stunning 10-0 rejection of a development agreement approved by ranch owner Jim Hill and the Monterey County Board of Supervisors," the *Carmel Pine Cone* reported.³⁶

During the six-month conflict over the El Sur Ranch deal, an election had taken place that returned two new members to the board of supervisors. Both Sam Karas and Karin Strasser Kaufman, representing the fifth district, which includes Big Sur, opposed the development and owed some of their election support to citizens advocating a revised coastal plan. The board of supervisors now withdrew the version of the Big Sur LCP that was pending final review by the Coastal Commission and began new hearings aimed at a more current and effective regulation. Strasser Kaufman led the popular campaign, attracting varied local groups and drawing from lessons of the aborted agreement. The controversy helped define a new policy.³⁷

Sentiment on revision favored small-scale and locally owned operations, low density, growth limits, transient rather than “point-of-destination” traffic and accommodations, housing for local service employees, and enforcement of critical viewshed policies. Ironically, the CPOA and BSLT, which had been on different sides of earlier issues, now expressed agreement on most fundamentals. The CPOA urged further conditions that would block “federalization” of Big Sur by outlawing the transfer of property to government agencies. That provision, however, would conflict with the constitutional right of a property owner to sell to whomever he or she wishes. In fact, the U.S. Forest Service is the major landowner in Big Sur and many long-term residents have happily sold to that federal agency in the absence of other buyers. The larger result, nevertheless, was a new political consensus on preservation and limits of growth.

In October 1985 the Monterey County Board of Supervisors adopted the new Big Sur Coast LUP “with an almost audible sigh of collective relief [after] ten years in the making,” and the Coastal Commission gave final approval in April 1986. In official terminology, the LUP is the “primary component” of the state-mandated LCP. Concretely, the 1986 LUP was the new law of the coast, superseding Nathaniel Owings’ 1962 Coast Master Plan. Yet the new and old plans were similar in many respects, most importantly in the priority they gave to preservation and the viewshed. As the 1986 plan states, “The overall direction for the future of the Big Sur Coast is based around the theme of preserving the outstanding natural environment. . . . The County’s basic policy is to prohibit all future public or private development visible from Highway 1.” The 125-page document also details norms for resource management, land use and development, and public access, focusing in all these areas on limited growth, small scale, local control, and preservation of the natural landscape as the basic

resource from which all the others derive. Some exceptions were written into the plan and several businesses owned by CPOA activists were exempted. In the end, however, the Big Sur LUP forcibly reaffirmed conservation values based on historical tradition and decades of government-citizen policy collaboration. The plan has been described as one of the strongest local environmental programs in the country.³⁸

The growing concern for open-space preservation characteristic of the Big Sur conflict was reflected in statewide action in the 1980s. A series of ballot initiatives and bond measures was proposed by the legislature and, in many cases, passed by the electorate. Proposition 18 (1984) appropriated \$370 million for land acquisition, fostering recreation and wildlife preservation. Proposition 43 (1986) gave \$100 million for local parks. But the greatest of these measures was Proposition 70, which provided \$776 million for wildlife, coastal, and parkland conservation, funds that were allocated to and administered by county governments. Many of the groups that were active in the El Sur Ranch controversy and LUP revision joined the referendum campaign in support of Proposition 70. Strasser Kaufman promoted the initiative publicly and BSLT helped circulate petitions statewide. The initiative passed by an impressive 65 percent in June 1988.³⁹

Monterey County received \$25 million in Proposition 70 funding for use in Big Sur. The new law required that land eligible for preservation be located within the viewshed and deemed “buildable” by the county. The idea, of course, was to protect visible land from development. BSLT volunteered its services to landowners making application to the county. Initial acquisitions were small and strategic. During the decade of acquisition under Proposition 70, twenty-five properties were protected. BSLT acted as the intermediary for tax benefits in seventeen of these transactions totaling nearly 200 acres of prime viewshed.

The first twenty-four purchases consumed more than \$13 million, leaving a healthy balance in the fund. In June 1991, James Hill reopened discussions with BSLT, proposing the sale of development rights to viewshed land on 3,550 acres not covered in previous easements on the El Sur Ranch and reasserting his right to develop land outside the viewshed east of Highway 1. The county agreed to pay \$11.5 million for the easement, a figure described by Hill interests as well below a \$16 million appraisal. Others characterized the amount as nearly half the county's total allocation from Proposition 70 and a generous reward for parting with development rights that were themselves subject to county land-use and Coastal Commission regulation. Hill also received credit for a "charitable donation" of \$4.5 million, the difference between the appraised and sale prices.⁴⁰

USEFUL LESSONS AND LOOMING THREATS

In the thirty years since the controversy over the California Coastal Act began, progress has been made toward agreement between the various actors in the Big Sur development conflict. Proposed development at El Sur Ranch and Point Lobos has united resident advocates of limited and locally controlled growth with county officials and planners working within structures created by the California Coastal Commission. The CPOA and BSLT have worked the same side of the street. Under the threat of outside intervention, local interests of all stripes have hammered out a tough LCP. Ironically, the cumulative 1986 Big Sur LUP took protection of the once-controversial viewshed as its centerpiece and crafted a multi-agency collaborative mechanism resembling Representative Panetta's original bill. Contending interests now compete with one another from different philosophical positions for the more effective practical policy. The result is broader participation and convergence on more satisfactory solutions. The peace is regu-

larly threatened as, for example, in 1986, when Senator Pete Wilson briefly proposed another national scenic area bill (S2159) and when the county master plan came up for review in the late 1990s. Potential conflict lies in wait.

Recent years have witnessed both continuing public-private collaboration and new threats to environmental protection. In 2002, The Nature Conservancy and BSLT negotiated the purchase by the state of the Palo Corona Ranch overlooking Carmel Bay for \$37 million, drawn largely from bond funds (Proposition 40). BSLT Director Cory Brown persuaded Governor Gray Davis to commit state funds to the purchase in an eleventh-hour action. Palo Corona is at once the latest, largest, most visible, and costliest addition to Big Sur's protected lands, embracing 9,898 acres that extend eleven miles from the south bank of the Carmel River and Highway 1 to Palo Colorado Canyon. The property includes sixteen watersheds, seven creeks in addition to the Carmel River, extensive redwood groves, and a variety of wildlife from mountain lions to steelhead trout. The ranch borders twelve other protected properties from Point Lobos State Reserve to Los Padres National Forest. The Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District will manage a 500-acre recreational area in the northern portion of the property with the rest preserved as wilderness. Adventurous hikers can now walk from Carmel to Hearst Castle without ever leaving land under some form of public protection.

Yet serious threats loom. During the past decade, environmental protection has lost some of its salience among national political commitments. Demographic pressures argue for new development, particularly in the West, California, and along the coast. The state struggles with fiscal limitations that may cripple the once-generous conservation effort. About 85 percent of all the money raised for land purchases and easements in Big Sur derive from state sources. Without public support, conservation on a broad scale is



The 10,000-acre Palo Corona Ranch was permanently protected in 2002 by a \$35 million purchase using state bond funds and brokered by The Nature Conservancy and The Big Sur Land Trust. Operated jointly by the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District and the California State Parks Department, the northern portions of the park overlooking Carmel Bay are open to the public.

COURTESY OF THE BIG SUR LAND TRUST

impossible. It is also true that public lands have been mismanaged by government agencies that have allowed clear cutting of forests and mining, resulting in toxic chemical by-products. Land trusts, misused for tax evasion and profit by developers, are criticized for acting as agents in land acquisitions that involve hefty commissions despite their nonprofit status. Local opponents of public land management have legitimate grievances over the scarcity and high price of housing in Big Sur. Many service workers commute long distances from lower-rent towns like Watsonville. But land preservation is scarcely the cause of inflated real estate prices everywhere or the failure of affordable housing. Conversely, public access to the land contributes to a healthy economy and jobs. As local historian Jeff Norman observes, “Most of the purchases of land have

not involved people losing their houses, and they have increased tourism.”⁴¹

If the short term appears threatening, the longer historical record offers encouragement, useful lessons, and evidence of success. After all the explanations for achievement have been explored, however, something still remains, some elusive ingredient of the story. Perhaps Henry Miller was right when he wrote that “the place itself” creates the “humility and reverence” for improving ourselves.

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