



## **County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors**

### **Agenda Item Submittal**

**From:** Board of Supervisors - Third District

**Subject:** North Coast Beaches Overnight Parking

**Meeting Date:** March 25, 2025

**Formal Title:** Direct staff in the Community Development and Infrastructure Department to process a Coastal Development Permit authorizing the County to prohibit overnight parking from midnight to 5:00 a.m. along Highway 1 at Shark Fin Cove, Panther Beach, Davenport Beach, and Davenport Pier parking lots

### **Recommended Actions**

Direct staff to process a Coastal Development Permit authorizing the County to prohibit overnight parking from midnight to 5:00 a.m. at parking areas along Highway 1 at Shark Fin Cove, Panther Beach, Davenport Beach, and Davenport Pier parking lots, in coordination with the property owners at these locations.

### **Executive Summary**

The beaches along the County's north coast have experienced major increases in visitors both day and night causing, at times, documented illegal social behavior, as well as damage to coastal resources. Many of these beaches are inaccessible by vehicles making effective law enforcement impossible, particularly at night. This leave leaves regulation of the adjacent parking areas the only effective enforcement mechanism. Additionally, some of the vehicles that have parked and not moved have also created barriers to public access and impacts to coastal resources. Imposing limited parking restrictions on the area would act as a deterrent to help reduce impacts to environmental resources and create turnover for vehicles that have been parked for multiple days at a time and restrict public access.

### **Discussion**

There was a time when 24/7 visitation to north coast beaches had minimal impact on coastal resources and people would not park for multiple days at a time and discard their waste in the parking areas. Today these impacts have increased to the point where intervention needs to occur to help protect environmental resources while also providing public access. North coast residents, the Sheriff, and the Third District office have been concerned for many years with illegal activities and damage to coastal resources at difficult to access north coast beaches and their associated parking lots. Attached is a report prepared when Ryan Coonerty was Supervisor documenting the problem, which has only grown worse in recent years as the number of visitors continues to increase.

With the Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument projected to open in the near future, the number of visitors to the north coast and north coast beaches will increase even further. In addition, Segment 5 of the Rail Trail from Wilder Ranch State Park to Davenport is now under construction and scheduled for completion in 2026. This bike and pedestrian trail is expected to be extremely popular leading to increased beach visitation along its route.

Most visitors to the north coast are law abiding and respectful of our precious coastal

resources. However, a small percentage are not and, unfortunately, they can cause significant social problems as well as damage to coastal resources. This can be seen as graffiti on cliff faces, trash that is left on the beaches from overnight parties, and RVs that sit for months and associate trash that is strewn about in the vicinity. With the number of visitors to the beaches increasing, the existing serious problems will only worsen unless interventions are implemented to reduce the negative impacts on the environment.

While effective law enforcement is always desired, given limited staff resources, law enforcement becomes extremely challenging at the many beaches that are inaccessible to vehicles and have limited emergency communication, especially at night. Expecting law enforcement officers to patrol these beaches at night even when there is evidence of inappropriate behavior occurring, just isn't realistic.

Through the creation of Cotoni Coast Dairies, the Rail Trail, improved beach signage, and parking improvements, the County has been committed to increasing public access to the coast, which is a high priority under the Coastal Act. Protecting the coast's environmental resources is also a priority under the Coastal Act and given the increase in environmental degradation at certain beaches due to increased visitation, we are proposing restrictions that attempt to balance providing coastal access and protecting the environment. The Coastal Act should not have the unintended consequence of fostering illegal behavior and damage to coastal resources through increased coastal access.

For the reasons stated above, we are proposing prohibiting vehicle parking from midnight to 5:00 A.M. in parking areas adjacent to Shark Fin Cove, Panther Beach, Davenport Beach, and Davenport Pier. These areas experience the highest amount of degradation, and the closures would be during a time when there is the least amount of visitation to the beaches. This approach strikes a reasonable balance between encouraging safe public access to the coast while deterring inappropriate and illegal activities.

### **Financial Impact**

The recommended action does not have any financial impact.

### **Strategic Initiatives**

Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety, Sustainable Environment  
Climate Action - Natural & Working Lands

### **Submitted By:**

Justin Cummings, Third District Supervisor

### **Recommended By:**

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

### **Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.