



Photo by Steven Churn

Big Sur resident Ruth Taylor, who helped organize opposition to expanded federal control in the area, stands on the porch of her bluff-top home. Ragged Point is in the background.

Fighting to keep a lifestyle

They moved to Big Sur in search of solitude. And, by and large, they've found it, except during the summer months when throngs of tourists wind past on Highway 1.

But the spotlight has turned in recent months to a handful of property owners who live and work along this rugged coastline in near-isolation close to the San Luis Obispo-Monterey county line.

A plan to place most of Big Sur's 100-mile coastline under federal control has frightened and angered residents here enough so they've banded together and gone public with their concerns.

"Big Sur is really a 100-mile long community, although most of the concern about overdevelopment is focused on northern Big Sur, closer to Carmel," said Ruth Elizabeth Taylor, executive director of the Committee Opposing Arrogant State Tyranny (COAST).

"Yet we share the same concerns and fears about that bill and its impact on our lives as our good neighbors to the north," she said. "So we formed COAST."

Taylor's 15-member group is made up of some who own property along the Big Sur coast north of the sprawling 77,000-acre Hearst Ranch. Most of them live in San Luis

Obispo County.

COAST formed as an offshoot of a much larger organization, Friends of the Big Sur, started three months ago in opposition to a proposal by Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif.

COAST, like Friends of Big Sur, is against Cranston's plan to expand U.S. Forest Service control of Big Sur lands through extensive acquisitions. The bill also would appropriate \$100 million for buying private land.

"It's a land grabbing scheme that has no rhyme or reason, none whatsoever," said Wiley P. Ramey, one of four owners of the motel perched at Ragged Point. "If they get a chance, they'll try to run us out. And for what reason?"

On a blustery, overcast April day recently, eight members of COAST gathered in the living room of Taylor's cliffside home north of Ragged Point to talk about Cranston's bill.

Most said they feared they'd lost their land under Cranston's proposal, which gives the Forest Service power to condemn property if they add to their homes or try to sell.

Some even suggested that Cranston's proposal to turn the coastline into the Big Sur Coast National Scenic Area, under the forest Service's jurisdiction, might lead to a

national park status for the area.

"We've even been told (the federal government) might close off both ends of Big Sur at San Simeon and Carmel and bus tourists along the coast," said Taylor, a freelance photographer and artist who moved to Big Sur from Southern California.

"A national park would ruin our lifestyle, spoil tourists' view of Big Sur and eventually lure 2,000 employees to the area to run such an operation," she said. "My goodness only 1,500 live in Big Sur now."

Members of COAST, which has attracted media attention from several Los Angeles radio and television stations, believe the resource limitations of the Big Sur will control growth naturally. They claim inadequate water supplies, steep hillsides and the remoteness of the area will prevent widespread development.

"People say we're overdeveloped," said Pete Sebastian, whose father settled near Ragged Point in 1888. "I've lived here most of my life and things have changed little."

"Why all of the attention now?" Sebastian wondered aloud. "I think (the federal government) knows what we have, and they want it."