



# SIERRA CLUB MARIN GROUP

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Marin County Board of Supervisors:

The Sierra Club, representing its 7,000 Marin County members, urges you to oppose the inclusion of West Marin in the Tourism Business Improvement District (BID). We believe that the overwhelming majority of West Marin residents welcome its millions of visitors. But just because tourism at its present growth rate is good, profitable, and welcomed, that does not mean that stimulating more tourism at this time is better. Traffic from current visitation to West Marin is already long overdue for mitigation, as shown by the outrage of coastal communities over the CTMP plan for visitation to southwest Marin parklands. And the BID proposal meets the CEQA criteria that trigger an environmental and traffic study.

We also believe that the BID's concept to attract visitors to West Marin only in off-peak periods is flawed: Bay Area residents come to the beach in the summer; out-of-towners come during their scheduled vacations. The decline in Marin tourism results from the general post-9-11 decline and the related low San Francisco hotel occupancy rate, both of which are beyond the scope of the BID to influence. Either the BID is a waste of money or it will succeed only by breaking its promise and increasing peak congestion.

It is inappropriate for municipalities profiting from visitor lodging in East Marin to solicit increased visitation whose traffic impacts will be exported to West Marin. It is likewise, inappropriate for certain West Marin hotels to continue to advertise for weddings, parties and conferences that draw in activities inconsistent with the passive recreation conserved in our Local Coastal Plans. Traffic impacts from these inconsistent uses are displaced to communities already struggling with park visitor impacts. The BID would enable these hotels to increasingly supplant the parklands to become destination sites themselves.

West Marin should not be encouraged to become more of "vacation" or "special event" community. Businesses in West Marin now have trouble hiring employees who must commute long distances due to the lack of affordable housing. The full-time population of Inverness continues to decline as homes are increasingly converted to short-term rentals, adding to the affordable housing shortage. What West Marin needs more than increased tourism is increased infill affordable housing, which would provide local businesses with year-round support. We hope that you will support the "Community Marin" vision which supports re-zoning commercial parcels in West Marin to encourage more affordable or worker housing and opposes trophy homes and hobby farms on agricultural property.

In summary, the BID proposal "gilds the lily" because making West Marin more attractive to tourists will kill off the very attributes that attract tourists (and residents) in the first place. Consequently, we request that you oppose the current proposal to include West Marin in the Tourism Business Improvement District and support the vision of Community Marin for sustainable, vibrant working communities in West Marin.

Sincerely,

Gordon Bennett, Conservation Co-chair, Sierra Club – Marin Group