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By James Feenan at 11:47 am, Aug 13, 2024

From: djensen@mcn.org
To: pbscommissions
Subject: Transient Camping Proposal
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Like many others who enjoy living in this county, I am very concerned and disappointed that you are considering the wholesale allowance of "low intensity transient camping." Mendocino County has not shown that it can adequately manage this type of activity. For decades now you have allowed "transient campgrounds" such as Wildwood Campground and others to become long-term, dare I say, ghettos. For years the County has received complaints about sanitation, trash, safety, water quality and other "high intensity" problems from "transient campgrounds" that have become poorly designed low-income housing. At least with these older summer camps we knew where they were located, but now you want to sprinkle them around the landscape like so much pixie dust. How do you intend to insure that today's short-term camper does not set down roots and become tomorrow's illegal residence?

It is an undisputed fact that the only enforcement of regulations in Mendocino County is complaint driven. Unfortunately, this county has repeatedly failed to demonstrate the ability to promptly respond to and resolve serious complaints received by the Planning & Building Department, despite the increase in staffing. Meanwhile, your Environmental Health department has suffered a shameful decrease in staffing and can barely fulfill their obligations to paying customers. At present, they cannot promptly respond to complaints about failing septic systems, illegal dumping, foodborne illness outbreaks and unpermitted wells. How can we realistically expect them to handle the increased health and safety concerns that will assuredly result from this free-for-all proposal?

Since I retired from County employment I have enjoyed camping in a small trailer. In particular, I have enjoyed camping on rustic Forest Service and BLM lands. But doing so has taught me that trailers and campervans have very limited wastewater and sewage storage. Without appropriate disposal facilities, the potential for illegal discharge increases each day these "low impact" campers remain on site. Worse yet, many campers feel that no camping experience is complete without toasted marshmallows and smores, along with the campfire that makes them possible. It is critical that you realize that "low intensity" is only a goal, not an assured outcome.

PLEASE, consider whether you are willing to commit to the level of oversight necessary to prevent the inevitable problems that will arise if you let this "low intensity transient" genie out of its bottle. I fear that your track record suggests otherwise.

David Jensen, Retired Director of Mendocino County Environmental Health

