

Rural Tourism Program

In July 2003, the County received a grant of \$70,000 from the Economic Development Administration of the U. S. Department of Commerce for a study of Rural Tourism. Rural tourism includes two types of activities:

1. **Agritourism:** Farmers supplement their agricultural operation with activities such as you-pick fruit and vegetables, pumpkin patches, hayrides, school and youth group tours, interactive displays, local historic/cultural activities, petting zoos, and farmstays. Agritourism offers urban visitors the opportunity to gain increased understanding of and respect for the complexities of the agricultural industry that produces the food we eat as well as much of the clothing we wear.
2. **Nature Tourism:** Farmers and other rural residents supplement their incomes with outdoor and nature related activities. These differ from agritourism in that they are not tied to agricultural production, and take place in areas designated Open Space rather than on agricultural land. Ventura County has vast and varied outdoor recreational possibilities—miles of hiking trails in the Los Padres National Forest; opportunities to observe rare and endangered species such as the spectacular California Condor; beaches where visitors and residents can sunbathe, swim, surf, and kayak; the Channel Islands with their unique species; and fishing and whale-watching on the Pacific Ocean. Few if any other localities can offer such a range of recreational choices. Further, Ventura's temperate Mediterranean climate allows visitors to enjoy these activities nearly year-round.

A primary goal of the project was to promote rural tourism as a complement to the County's agricultural industry. Working with an Advisory Committee of rural tourism stakeholders, the County Planning Division developed a set of revisions to the Non-Coastal Zoning Ordinance (NCZO). In March 2005 the Board of Supervisors adopted these revisions. The NCZO revisions addressed three aspects of Rural Tourism: overnight accommodations, structures and facilities, and activities and events. Below is a summary of the adopted revisions.

I. Overnight Accommodations.

- A. Bed and Breakfast Inns.
 1. **Previous Status.** Bed-and-Breakfast Inns (B&Bs) were allowed in the Agricultural Exclusive (AE) and Open Space (OS) zones only if they are on Cultural Heritage sites.
 2. **Revisions.** Bed-and-Breakfast Inns are allowed in the AE and OS zones regardless of whether the location is a Cultural Heritage site. The applicant must obtain a Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Commission, subject to the following requirements:
 - a) B&Bs are allowed in the Open Space zone only if the property is in agricultural production, in order to protect sensitive biological resources that exist in the OS zone.
 - b) The B&B must be operated by the same person or family who owns the property on which it is located.

In addition, the definition of Bed-and-Breakfast Inns was revised to bring it into conformance with State regulations regarding Farm stays or agricultural home stays.

B. Retreats.

1. **Previous Status.** Retreats were allowed in the Open Space (OS), Rural Agricultural (RA), and Rural Exclusive (RE) zones. Retreats are required to be operated by a non-profit organization.
2. **Revisions.** The requirement that retreats be operated by a non-profit organization was eliminated.

C. Camps.

1. **Previous Status.** Camps were allowed in the RA and RE zones, but not in the AE and OS zones.
2. **Revisions.** Camps are allowed in the OS but not the AE zone. A Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Commission is required.
 - a) The definition of "Camps" was amended to require a structured program of outdoor and nature oriented activities. The "Camps" use would include guest ranches, including working ranches with a guest ranch component.
 - b) Camps would be allowed in the OS zone only if the property is in agricultural production. This requirement is intended to protect sensitive biological resources in the Open Space zone.
 - c) There is a minimum site size of 50 acres in the OS zone.
 - d) In the OS zone, there is an overnight population limit of 0.25 guests and staff per acre, with an absolute limit of 250 people overnight. There would be a daily population limit of 0.5 guests and staff per acre, with an absolute limit of 500 people, except for special events, as allowed by the Conditional Use Permit. The population limits are not applicable to employees of working ranches/farms who are engaged solely in working ranch activities. For an employee who is engaged in both working ranch/farm and camp activities, the employee shall count as 0.5 staff.
 - e) Previous regulations limited structures for overnight accommodations to 200 square feet per overnight guest and staff. All other roofed structures or buildings were limited to 100 square feet per daily on-site population. A provision was added stating that the square footage limits are not applicable to buildings of working ranches/farms which are used solely for working ranch activities. There is a maximum limit of 25,000 square feet for a single building, and 50,000 square feet for all buildings combined. For buildings that are used for both working ranch/farm and camp activities, one-half of the building's area counts against the camp limits.
 - f) To address the concern over the use of motorized vehicles, there is a requirement that future project description cover transportation to and from and within the site, including the types of vehicles and road and trail locations.
 - g) The previous requirement that 60% of the total site remain in its natural state or be landscaped, was revised to require that 60% of the total site remain in its natural state or be in agriculture. The requirement that only passive recreational uses be allowed was deleted.

II. Structures and Facilities

A. Botanic Gardens and Arboreta.

1. **Previous Status.** Botanic gardens and arboreta were allowed only in the Commercial Planned Development (CPD) zone.
2. **Revisions.** These uses are now allowed in the OS zone, with a Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Commission.
 - a) A definition for Botanic Gardens and Arboreta was added to the appropriate section.
 - b) The minimum permit area in the OS zone is 50 acres. There is no minimum permit area in the CPD zone. A minimum of 80% of the area must be planted.
 - c) Botanic Gardens/Arboreta are limited to one gift shop per site, with a maximum area of 1,000 square feet. Items sold in the gift shop are limited to plant related items, except that up to 20% of the inventory could be pre-prepared snack items.
 - d) Roofed structures are limited to 500 square feet per acre, with a maximum limit of 25,000 square feet. Types of structures are limited to information centers/kiosks, administrative offices, restrooms, a gift shop, and maintenance/storage facilities. These limitations don't apply to hothouses/greenhouses.
 - 5) There are specific regulations which require that the design and landscaping of botanic gardens and arboreta minimize impact on natural habitats and prevent the spread of invasive species.

III. Activities and Events

A. Festivals and Similar Events, Temporary Outdoor.

- a. **Previous Status.** "Festivals and Similar Events, Temporary Outdoor" were allowed in the AE and OS zones with a Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Director. Based on the definition of "temporary," festivals could occur for up to 30 calendar days, but this limit could be extended through the conditions of the use permit.
- b. **Revisions.** The definition of Festivals and Similar Events has been revised to include such events as harvest festivals, historic re-enactments, and weddings. In addition, the 60-day limit per calendar year was made fixed, so that it would no longer be possible to allow additional days through CUP permit conditions.