

Mark Stone wins seat on Coastal Commission

Environmentalists praise
appointment of county supervisor

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Santa Cruz County Supervisor Mark Stone was appointed to the California Coastal Commission on Friday.

His selection marks the first time in nearly two decades a county resident will have a seat on the powerful regulatory board. The appointment is widely viewed as win for the environmental community, which fought to block a pro-development voice on the panel.

"I very much want to be a part of California's future and the decisions that are made," said Stone, a longtime environmentalist and avid open-water swimmer. This summer, Stone completed a sports milestone, swimming across the English Channel.

"I'm honored to be appointed," he said.

As a member of the 12-person commission, Stone will weigh in on the fate of virtually all



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development along the California coastline, from new hotels on the Monterey Peninsula to water treatment projects in Santa Cruz. He'll keep his job on the Board of Supervisors, but spend up to three days each month addressing state matters.

The appointment was announced by Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, D-Los Angeles. In making her decision, the Southern California Democrat skipped over 12-year incumbent Dave Potter, a Monterey County supervisor. Bass has declined to say why Potter, who had been reappointed as a matter of routine for many years, was not chosen.

In a statement Friday, Bass made only a generic comment about her selection, citing Stone's "deep appreciation" for the "health, safety and beauty" of the coast. Her office could not be reached for further comment.

But environmentalists say Stone's pro-conservation record was what pushed him to the top.

"There was a strong coalition of environmental groups that supported a change from Potter. (Bass) heard these groups," said Lennie Roberts, a Coastal Commission watchdog and legislative advocate for the Palo Alto-based Committee for Green Foothills.

Roberts said the Coastal Commission is still not as protective of the coast as she might like but said the group would be better.

Stone, a resident of Scotts Valley, has served on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors since 2003. Previously, he was a trustee for the Scotts Valley Unified School District and maintained a private law practice. He is married with two children.

As a supervisor, Stone has always been cautious of new development and supportive of environmental programs. He was one of the leading proponents of the county's new Commission on the Environment, a panel that has begun to address such issues as climate change and water conservation.

Stone says he sees these global issues becoming an increasing priority for the state, citing a demand for energy projects and desalination plants along the

coastline.

"California is taking some different directions in respect to planning, and the Coastal Commission needs to be a part of that," he said.

He pledged to be an objective voice on the panel, able to balance "economic pressure" with "protecting the legacy of the coast."

Potter said Friday he wished Stone well. He said he was disappointed not to be reappointed to the commission, and faulted Bass not for her pick but for her lack of transparency over the selection process.

"I'm a little surprised I never heard from the speaker's office," he said, noting that Bass never spoke with him about the job. "I would have thought after 12 years I'd at least get a courtesy call."

Gary Patton, a former Santa Cruz County supervisor and longtime conservationist, praised the speaker's choice.

"I think it's good news that we have a change in our representation," Patton said. "Dave (Potter)'s record is not good."

Potter's 2007 commission vote in support of the Pebble Beach Co.'s expansion plans are held up by environmentalists as evidence of his pro-development agenda. Potter has also received low marks in the Sierra Club's annual scorecard.

Potter, though, says he leaves behind a legacy of fair and balanced judgment on coastal issues.

"I pride myself on having done my homework for every meeting and looked at the issues objectively," he said.