

Friends of the Gualala River

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Mr. Allen Robertson
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Via e-mail

April 26, 2011

SUBJECT: FAIRFAX CONVERSION PROJECT PARTIALLY RECIRCULATED DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT COMMENTS

Dear Mr. Robertson:

Friends of the Gualala River (FOGR) is submitting these written comments to add to the files on this project and to incorporate by reference earlier comments sent in to the DEIR file by FOGR on July 26th, 2009. This letter is joined by a letter in support of FOGR's CEQA comments submitted by Emilio Valencia, the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria.

FOGR is a non-profit, volunteer, citizens organization concerned with the protection and enhancement of the Gualala River and its watershed. More broadly we are concerned about the health and wellbeing of north coast rivers and the coastal ecosystem.

From that referenced 2009 comment letter:
Page 1-6 of Vol. 1 of the DEIR Comments:
"Summary of Comments Received on the Notice of Preparation
and Previously Prepared Mitigated Negative Declaration"

"The following list is a summary of concerns taken from comments made at the scoping meeting, comment letters received prior to the close of the 30-day comment period, and comment letters received on the previous negative declaration. Many of the comments received on the previous negative declaration addressed the need to prepare an EIR, such comments are not included in the below summary as they are not relevant to this document. All of the environmental issues raised by the commenters on the previous MND as well as the more recent comments submitted during the NOP comment period have been included in the below summary, **and addressed in the EIR where appropriate.**" (emphasis added)

Comment: Contrary to the above assertion, very few of the 120 specific substantive concerns outlined in the comment letters starting on page 1-6 were directly

addressed in the DEIR. In addition, next to none were addressed using supporting data or scientific studies. If mentioned, most were dismissed offhand as insignificant potential impacts. The following are examples of the few mentions of these specific concerns and their non-substantial dismissals.”

-From FOGR 2009 DEIR comment letter

As of this writing in April 2011, nearly all of the concerns listed in the 2009 comment letter remain unaddressed by the applicant. The two areas listed as re-circulated and presently open for comment, the Cultural Resources and Greenhouse Gas analyses are seriously flawed and have been addressed by submitted letters on behalf of FOGR by experts in their respective fields. FOGR comments on the two analyses follow.

Cultural Resources

The April 24, 2011 letter on behalf of FOGR from Dr. Peter R. Schmidt, Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology of the University of Florida clearly states that standard practices dictate “a more thorough investigation of the site using an implementation of rigorous surface and subsurface surveys that have been previously recommended, but ignored.” This ignored level of more thorough study is needed due to the recognized importance of the site as individually significant but also due to its relationship to neighboring sites. The need to designate the complex of sites including the Artesa site as an archeological “district” is just one of the main recommendations of this expert. The recommendation is in part based on the applicant’s own references to its importance being “somewhat unique as a District” on p. 3.5-3.9 of the DEIR.

No reference is included to any discoveries and their cumulative cultural resources impacts from the archeological investigations in the nearby massive 20K acre Preservation Ranch vineyard project.

The submitted April 24, 2011 letter from the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria supporting FOGR’s defense of the tribe’s interests is a powerful indicator that there is a local recognition of the importance of this site culturally and archeologically. This well known, historically named site is held unique as a trading village and for its size and importance in the past tribal history of occupancy in this area of the coast.

FOGR supports the expert recommendations for appropriate investigation, study, and incorporation into a district designation of the cultural resources on the property. Its potential value as a cultural and archeological resource will be lost if the present mitigations proposed by the applicant are implemented.

Pertinent to the inadequacy of the Cultural Resources methods and mitigations is the recent news that the adjacent parcel to the west of approximately 34 acres has entered into a sales contract with a buyer, namely the Bryce Jones Vineyards Company. The area of concern for the cultural resources of the immediate area extends out onto the 34 acres of this parcel. No record as yet of any archeological investigations has been submitted for this parcel and this might be important in the adoption of a district designation for the area. Additionally, this parcel has been available for an extended period of time on the vineyard land real estate market and represents an example of an off-site alternative to the

project that would not require forestland conversion and thereby be less impacting. Due to the economic downturn an increasing number of vineyards and agriculturally developed land parcels are now available in the county that would be appropriate alternative sites for the applicant's project.

The alternatives analysis of the DEIR should be completely re-evaluated based on a comprehensive inventory of archaeological resources associated with the prehistoric village site, and full significance of a potential archaeological district designation.

Greenhouse Gas Analysis

FOGR is concerned that the greenhouse gas analysis in the DEIR is flawed due to its construction using an undocumented CALFIRE spreadsheet and the lack of a forest inventory on the site to enable entry of verifiable figures into that or other spreadsheet program. Added to these deficiencies are the preparer's illogical assumptions of projected rates of carbon sequestration of the project compared to sustainable forestry management on the same site. These are all well addressed in the April 10, 2011 letter submitted on behalf of FOGR by Registered Professional Forester Tom Gaman.

Using the submitted figures by the preparer it is clear that the stated goal of California to substantially reduce GHG emissions by 2020 will only be hindered by this project. If the off-site alternative of buying an existing vineyard or existing converted agricultural land is considered, the applicant could achieve their desired result (a vineyard) with significantly less environmental impact. Another alternative is the avoidance of forest conversion by just planting in the presently non-forested areas of the parcel.

In addition to the alternatives noted above and those in the Cultural Resources comments, the option for funding acquisition of the property from a non-profit, public, or private institutional is very likely due to its superior value as a forest preserve. With its high scenic, tourism, cultural, ecological, and recreational values and proximity to the heavily populated San Francisco Bay area, the property is a prime candidate for the alternative of establishment of a redwood forest preserve.

We look forward to response as to these concerns and their addition to the comment letters for the DEIR.

Sincerely,



Chris Poehlmann

Friends of the Gualala River