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May 12, 2004

Alan Robertson
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
1416 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: THP 1-04-030 SON (TCP 04-530) "Hansen/Whistler"
THP 1-04-055 SON (TCP 04-533) "Zapar (Roessler)"
THP 1-04-059 SON (TCP 04-531) "Sleepy Hollow (Martin)"

Dear Mr Robertson:

There have been an increasing number of Timberland conversion applications in the Northwest part of Sonoma County in recent months and this represents yet another threat to the dwindling amount of Forestland in the region. This tendency is particularly distressing since these conversions involve clear cutting and complete destruction of part of a forest and it's ecosystem.

This tendency, when combined with the reality that unsustainable timber harvest practices seem to be the rule rather than the exception, represents a serious threat to productive timberland and the wildlife attempting to survive in that constantly shrinking and more fragmented habitat.

Furthermore the end result of these conversions-usually vineyards, results in not only an ever increasing tendency towards monoculture (Over 56,000 acres in wine grapes in Sonoma County already), but in increased sedimentation, pesticide and herbicide runoff into the streams and rivers where salmonid fish species on the brink of extinction attempt to survive. The Gualala River is already listed as an impaired river under 303(d) of the Clean Water Act and a great deal of money, time and energy is being spent by state and federal agencies as well as private groups and individuals to deal with the restoration of this watershed and its endangered species. To allow a process such as these conversions that contributes to the further degradation of the watershed is not only irresponsible but also unconscionable.

Since vineyards need to be irrigated this presents additional problems to this already water scarce area. The over pumping of wells to recharge reservoirs can lead to aquifer depletion. This can deplete residential water wells close by. Also the diversions of stream water to fill reservoirs can severely deplete the winter flows necessary for fish habitat. These diversions have become a common problem on many rivers and streams in Northern California due to their deleterious effect on stream flows critical to the survival of Salmonids.

Another threat to the preservation of our forests and related natural resources seems to be the Sonoma County General Plan. It allows vineyard conversions under its "Resource and Rural Development" classification. Yet the Plan states "The Primary purpose of this land use

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category is to protect the lands needed for commercial timber production and to protect natural resource lands including watershed, fish, and wildlife habitat, and biotic uses".

Since these conversions have the potential to do irreparable harm to forestland, its ecosystems, endangered species, water supply, and furthermore violate the mandate of the county general plan, we urge that an EIR be required for every Forestland Conversion application. The EIR should determine the effects of the conversion on Timber resources, water supply, water quality, endangered species, and the cumulative impacts on the ecosystem of the region.

The time has past when government agencies can shirk their responsibilities to protect our badly depleted and compromised natural resources. The Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter urges you to act swiftly and decisively to do what the people have empowered and entrusted you to do.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and please place this letter into the official files in each of the projects listed at the top of this letter.

Sincerely,
Peter Ashcroft
Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter