

Calderon, Vanessa A. x5186

From: Mary Ann Matthews [mmatthews2@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, February 02, 2009 5:00 PM
To: ceqacomments
Cc: Carol Leneve; Rosemary Donlon
Subject: GPU 5 Comments by CNPS

Monterey County
Planning and Building
Inspection Administration

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Feb. 2, 2009

Mike Novo, Acting Planning Director
RMA--Planning, Salinas Permit Center
168 West Alisal St., 2nd Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for GPU 5

Dear Mr. Novo:

The Monterey Bay Chapter of CNPS would like to submit the following comments on what has become known at GPU5: We are deeply concerned that in many cases this document is claimed to have fewer impacts than the 1982 General Plan, which is certainly to be expected because of the additional constraints that are recognized by today's planners. However, the actuality is that this document, in almost all cases with which we are familiar having to do with the protection of sensitive habitat, would increase the environmental impacts and worsen the quality of life for our citizens. Because of the loosening of standards in many areas, the impacts on biological resources, our chief concern, would be unacceptably increased. The generally appropriate goals cited under General Land Use in GPU5 appear to be based largely on GP82, but the detailed policies to carry them out actually create incentives to sprawl, promoting serious impacts particularly on biological resources. Open Space policies focus on protection of scenic views rather than on biological resources, and policies are proposed that would seriously weaken protection of our county's plant and animal resources.

1

For example, the policy on native plants is extremely inadequate if not legally defective in limiting protection of plants to those listed by the State or Federal agencies as threatened or endangered. CEQA requires consideration of all species identified as sensitive or special status species in local or regional plans, policies or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. We urge you to return to the much sounder policies of GP82. The language should state that "Qualified scientists' shall be consulted and appropriate measures shall be taken to protect rare and endangered plant species and their habitat."

2

The policy on development has been severely weakened from the GP82 policy. We urge retention of the latter policy, which states: "Development shall be carefully planned in, or adjacent to, areas containing limited or threatened plant communities, and shall provide for the conservation and maintenance of the plant communities."

3

The document states "Landowners and developers shall be encouraged to preserve the integrity of existing terrain and native vegetation in visually sensitive areas such as hillsides, ridges, and watersheds. Routine and ongoing agriculture shall be exempt from this policy." The latter activities should be carefully spelled out, as some types of ag activities can be very destructive of hillsides, ridges, and watersheds, and must not be given a blank check.

4

We strongly support the policy encouraging the use of drought-tolerant native plants and urge that lawns be specifically minimized by using drought-tolerant native and native-compatible groundcovers.

5

The list of routine and ongoing agricultural activities that may be exempt from GPU5 policies also includes other activities that could be harmful to the public health and welfare. These include conversion of previously uncultivated rangeland to cultivated agricultural use (which should not be allowed on slopes over 25% because of recognized problems with erosion, loss of important wildlife habitat, loss of oak woodlands, increased use of water and chemical inputs, etc.; fumigating and other pest control activities; and streambank alterations. We urge that these areas specifically not be included in exempted activities. Even allowing conversion with a permit gives carte blanche to environmentally destructive actions, particularly in view of the new protections afforded oak woodland by state law (AB 32) and the impact on climate change.

6

The policy (CV 6.2) stating that rural agriculture in Carmel Valley should be encouraged, "except on slopes of 25% or greater or where it would require the conversion of extensive removal of existing native vegetation. This policy does not clearly prohibit conversion of uncultivated vegetation to agriculture on slopes above 25%. The existing policy prohibiting conversion of uncultivated slopes in excess of 25% should be retained for the reasons listed above and should lbe applied to other erosion-prone areas of the county. We are also very concerned about the promotion of Winery Corridor Plans when no standards have been developed to assure the protection of sensitive plants, wildlife, and their habitats. The importance of preserving critical wildlife corridors should be clearly spelled out in this document.

7

The native Monterey Pine Forest is a sensitive biological resource that at the present time does not even have the protection accorded much less threatened species such as redwoods, oaks, and madrones, which all have special protections in the Monterey Co. Tree Ordinance. It is a serious oversight that the Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*) is not protected in either the Carmel Valley Area Plan, the Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan or the overall General Plan. Some years ago when scientists became alarmed by the spread of pitch canker and urged that healthy Monterey pine should be preserved, CNPS and other groups asked Supervisor Dave Potter to propose an ordinance to protect the native trees. He responded that the time to do that would be during the GP update. We and others have repeatedly asked that this be done, but this issue has been ignored.

8

The policy listing criteria for mines and quarries in the Carmel River watershed needs to be refined. Because of the severe erosion problems that the Carmel River has had over the years, mines and quarries can no longer be justified in the Carmel River watershed because of the severe environmental damage they cause. This policy should also apply to other areas of the county.

9

The list of protected trees should also include the Monterey Pine Forest. The protected habitats list should include the Monterey Pine Forest.

10

The policy stating that new development that causes a drawdown of the aquifer shall be designed in a manner so that it does not threaten natural vegetation should be altered. Drawing down the aquifer is likely to harm or kill riparian vegetation that keeps the river banks from eroding away in high water. It is prohibited by the MPWMD. The State Water Resources Control Board has already determined that the Carmel River is overpumped by over 10,000 acre feet per year. The policy should be deleted or revised as follows: "New development is prohibited that would draw down the Carmel River aquifer."

11

Please retain the wording in the 1982 GMPAP "In order to preserve scenic and rural character, ridgeline development shall not be allowed unless a special permit is first obtained."

12

We understand that the Planning Commission is currently discussing these issues. We would appreciate it very much if you would be kind enough to see that the commissioners receive a copy of these comments. Thank you for your consideration. We are sending this by email to meet the deadline but will submit the comments on our letterhead.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Ann Matthews, Conservation Chair
Monterey Bay Chapter, CNPS