

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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Agenda Item 11 SMMC 9/24/12

April 26, 2010

Mr. Bob Burrow, AICP
Director of Community Development
City of Camarillo
601 Carmen Drive
Camarillo, California 93010

**Conejo Creek Properties Specific Plan
Preparation of Environmental Impact Report**

Dear Mr. Burrow:

As the principal State land use planning agency for the Santa Monica Mountains Zone and surrounding watersheds, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) wishes to be involved in the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Conejo Creek Properties Specific Plan. Please add the us to your mailing list for this project. Given that the Conservancy did not receive the notice of preparation, we would like these comments incorporated into the DEIR.

The Conservancy's primary concern is wildlife movement through the project area generally and through the Conejo Creek undercrossing of Highway 101 in particular. The undercrossing provides the best, and perhaps the only, passage for large mammals for miles in either direction. The plan currently proposes multi-family residential for a key triangular parcel between the freeway, golf course, and creek. The plan also calls for an expansion of the Ridge View Street bridge over Conejo Creek. The agricultural field, while not providing any habitat value as of today only, facilitates mammals passing through the undercrossing to habitat on the other side of the freeway. Any development on this triangle would sever this regionally-significant link. The Conservancy requests that a "Wildlife Corridor Avoidance and Buffer Alternatizve" be included in the DEIR that returns this farmland to a natural state of riparian, woodland, and grassland habitat and that does not widen Ridge View Street, as shown by the attached image. This land should remain at floodplain elevation or much lower to retain natural hydrological function.

Conejo Creek retains most of its natural character and flows unimpeded to the ocean from its headwaters in the Conejo Valley. The Conservancy wishes to see this important riparian resource remain in its natural condition, and by progressively enhanced by restoration over the course of a decade or more. The project is located along the edge of the creek in its present floodplain. The plan proposes to elevate the floodplain and construct a bypass

Mr. Bob Burrow, AICP
Conejo Creek Properties Specific Plan
Preparation of Environmental Impact Report
April 26, 2010
Page 2

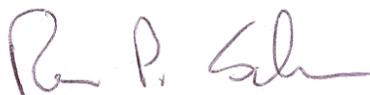
channel to carry the resulting storm flows. The Conservancy is all too familiar with other stream channelizations in the region and is therefore skeptical of this design. We would like to see more details of how this proposed channel interfaces with the natural streambed on both ends. Additionally, we want to know how large of a storm event would have to occur to divert water from its natural course into the channel. The DEIR should analyze alternative solutions for flood management to constructing this channel, including opportunities for natural infiltration across a much wider floodplain and wetland habitat creation. The stream historically meandered across its floodplain, depositing the fertile soils the area is known for. Poorly planned urban development restricts the creek's course.

Finally, development has well-documented edge effects on surrounding natural areas. Both the riparian corridor and the nearby foothills of Conejo Mountain stand to suffer from increased development in close proximity. The DEIR should study the extent to which a greater buffer between development and the creek is feasible to mitigate some of these effects. Wetland or other habitat creation within this buffer zone is entirely compatible with multiple project objectives. Open space could serve as a natural park providing both a scenic and recreation amenity to residents and habitat value for wildlife. The Conservancy recommends a 500-foot natural buffer between any riparian feature (the Creek or bypass channel) and the edge of development (see attached). Such a buffer area would not preclude passive recreation uses such as trails or landscaped stormwater infiltration depressions.

Although the project site has been active farmland for generations, the Specific Plan offers a unique opportunity to restore natural ecosystem function to the area. As other parts of the region seek to reestablish connections between urban and natural systems, Camarillo has the chance to get it right the first time.

We look forward to reviewing the DEIR when it becomes available. Please contact Paul Edelman of our staff at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128 and direct all future correspondence to him at the above letterhead address.

Sincerely,



RONALD P. SCHAFER
Chairperson