



MARIN COUNTY GROUP

Protecting the Marin environment since 1968
scmaringroup@gmail.com

Trust for Public Land
Re: San Geronimo Valley
101 Montgomery Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94104

10 July 2019

Dear Trust for Public Land Directors:

Thank you for the opportunity to share thoughts about possible future uses of the 157 acre property in San Geronimo, California, formerly known as the San Geronimo Golf Course ("SGGC," aka San Geronimo Valley Golf Course).

We are grateful for TPL's excellent work over the years, and we are grateful for your work related to the SGGC property so far.

The Sierra Club represents more than 6600 Marin residents, including many very active members who reside in the San Geronimo Valley. The Sierra Club has played a role in influencing key issues that have helped shape the San Geronimo Valley, and other parts of west Marin County, for several decades.

Before sharing particular recommendations, we'd like to share a little of this history of this property, and its surrounding lands.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Fifty years ago, plans for the San Geronimo Valley (which is comprised of four "post office" towns: Woodacre, San Geronimo, Forest Knolls, and Lagunitas) and many areas to the west, were planned to be used for sprawling residential suburbs, densely covering many of the hills of west Marin County. Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, which is now one lane in each direction, could have grown to up to four lanes in each direction. Schools, utilities, and commercial uses would have proliferated. Marin County's rich natural habitats and locally-owned agricultural operations would have been devastated.

In efforts made famous by books such as, "Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast," and "Farming on the Edge," the report, "Can the Last Place Last," and other written and filmed works, a great deal of west Marin was spared the spread of harmful human uses at that time. Those efforts fostered generations of environmental advocates, who have striven unceasingly to protect and preserve west Marin's natural habitats and compatible locally-owned agricultural operations.

The great majority of San Geronimo Valley residents treasure and embrace their role as stewards of the "gateway of west Marin." They identify with their home as primarily natural, and are committed to preservation of natural habitat. While there are small



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minorities who might advocate for housing or continued golf use on the SGGC property, the majority of San Geronimo residents see the San Geronimo Valley as principally a natural setting, with a few, compatible, locally-owned agricultural uses.

A few years before the purchase by the most recent prior owners, the SGGC property again seemed at risk of development, targeted by a developer who planned to cover much of the property with commercial and residential units. At that time, residents of the San Geronimo Valley pledged nearly three million dollars in an effort to purchase the property as open space, re-affirming local commitment to preserve that property from additional development. Unfortunately, fund-raising efforts fell far short of the asking price.

Local residents viewed the subsequent purchase for continued use as a golf course as a mixed blessing. While few would have liked golf usage to continue, golf prevented additional development and was seen as preferable to that alternative. Indeed, for many of the San Geronimo Valley's nature-loving residents, it was the first time they had ever felt grateful for a golf course.

Although the property has been largely protected from intensive development, up to this point, uses of the property may have cumulatively contributed to harmful habitat impacts of human uses of the area, for species such as native Coho salmon and others. Fortunately, we believe that the property would respond well to remediation.

This brings us to the present.

SIERRA CLUB SUMMARY POSITION

Below, we offer a few specific thoughts and suggestions. At the outset, however, we wish to express the following position:

In keeping with the wishes of the majority of San Geronimo Valley residents, the Sierra Club wishes to request that every effort be made to remediate and restore the SGGC property to a state of robust natural habitat, and that no additional residential, commercial, or industrial uses be considered.

SIERRA CLUB SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

MAIN USE

The Sierra Club wishes to request that every effort be made to remediate and restore the SGGC property to a state of robust natural habitat, and that no additional residential, commercial, or industrial uses be considered.

Despite preservation efforts, the San Geronimo valley has experienced significant



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growth in residential units (primarily within existing structures) and other detrimental environmental impacts. However, the area is still in a state in which to respond resiliently to remediation and restoration.

Restoration with robust native vegetation would be drought and fire resistant, and require minimal maintenance. It would also offer benefits in terms of carbon sequestration and habitat restoration.

We believe that restoration is in accord with the wishes of the substantial majority of existing residents.

In any scenario to be considered, the future of this property should maximize native restoration, and minimize impacts and uses harmful to restoration of native ecology.

OTHER USES

Continued Use as a Golf Course

The Sierra Club opposes continued use as a golf course.

While an ecologically-minded golf operation would be preferable to residential, commercial, or industrial purposes, we prefer natural restoration to golf, as golf is inherently harmful to native habitats, as well as intensive in water use and typically uses habitat-harming chemicals for landscaping maintenance.

Continued Existence of the Existing Clubhouse

We feel that the existing Clubhouse should be preserved. If practicable, that facility should be transferred to the Marin County Parks and Open Space department, and operated as a community resource for public events, and possibly for compatible private rental events.

Siting/Re-siting of a Fire-Fighting Station

We trust the County of Marin's Fire Department to know whether it would be beneficial to locate or re-locate one of its fire-fighting stations to this property.

However, if that is to be considered, care should be taken to preserve the natural environment and the community "viewshed," and to preserve the existing Clubhouse for community use.

With regard to viewshed, if a Fire Station were to be sited on this property, it should be sited off of Sir Francis Drake Blvd. Specifically, we recommend siting should be placed



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in the segment of the property to the west of Nicasio Valley Drive accessing Nicasio Valley Road or Sir Francis Drake Blvd.

Siting of a Community Waste Treatment Plant

In the strongest possible terms, the Sierra Club opposes the idea of siting any form of sewage treatment facility, no matter how large or small, at this location.

Installation of such an operation would be environmentally destructive at the outset, and prone to mismanagement and failure. Small community waste-treatment facilities are notoriously prone to cost over-runs that, eventually, play into risks of failure due to under-management.

We feel that West Marin can best solve its waste treatment challenges, at this time, by adopting state-mandated routine inspection of residential septic systems.

Continuation or Expansion of Existing Community Gardens

Existing community gardens should be maintained/preserved. At present, these activities do not appear to have had any substantial negative impacts to local habitat.

Community garden uses might be expanded, so long as it is done in ways that prevent negative impacts to restored native habitat, including water pathways.

We believe that, generally speaking, community gardens are less energy-intensive than commercial food processes, and offer benefits in terms of community resilience, natural education, and community connections with nature.

Agricultural Uses

Agricultural use should not be expanded beyond preservation of existing community gardens, and community garden expansion as outlined in the previous point. Marin has many other locations far, far more suitable for every kind of agricultural enterprise. This becomes more true if the goal is environmental remediation of that property. In addition, the historical usage of multiple pesticide applications makes agricultural usage problematic at best.

Housing, Commercial, Industrial Uses

The Sierra Club opposes any use of the property for housing, commercial uses, or



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industrial uses.

The same points about agriculture apply to housing, commercial, and industrial uses apply here. Marin has other locations far more suitable for every variation on these uses. The site should not be used as a location for any additional housing projects. The nearby creeks are already severely impacted. In addition, use of that site for housing would, without exaggeration, represent betrayal of the majority of existing residents of the San Geronimo Valley, who have fought for decades to prevent additional residential or commercial uses on that property.

Unpaved Path

We feel that an unpaved public path through the property could be created and maintained without negative impact to a primary goal of natural restoration.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we reiterate that Sierra Club requests that every effort be made to remediate and restore the SGGC property to a state of robust natural habitat, and that no additional residential, commercial, or industrial uses be considered.

We are happy to support any effort by TPL to return the former SGGC property primarily to a state of robust natural habitat.

Thank you,

Judy Schriebman
Chair, Marin Group Sierra Club