



Central Coast Forest Association

Caring for forests, protecting our land

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April 9, 2015

To: Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean St. Room 500
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Chairman Caput,

The Central Coast Forest Association would like to register its support for the Resolution Supporting the Santa Cruz County Working Lands Resolution.

We appreciate the resolution's recognition of the tremendous role our working lands provide to the county. The resolution as written provides tremendous flexibility in the services that Santa Cruz County can offer to support working lands. We believe it would be premature and unnecessarily binding to promote one "solution", such as conservation easements, over the entire array of possible support the county can provide to working lands.

A sustainable community is not simply environmentally sustainable. It must also be economically and socially sustainable. In a sustainable community, everyone pulls their share of the load. Working lands do their bit by providing services, jobs and contributing their share to the tax base.

Since CCFA is a forestry association, we will address the bulk of our comments to forestry, although we often find farm, forest and rangelands intermingled on the same parcel. We are aware of the great role farming and ranching provide to the county, including fruits and vegetables that are shipped across the entire country and meat and dairy products for a more local market and find them essential to maintaining the diversity of products that make the county's agriculture sector resilient.

Santa Cruz County working forests operate under the environmental gold standard. They are subject to very restrictive regulations and they receive input and oversight from a wide array of governmental agencies, including Calfire, the County, CGS, CCRWQCB, and CDFW. Privately owned working lands provide at no cost to the public:

- watershed services that ensure there is clean water for the community
- fresh air services
- carbon sequestration services, whose products are then passed on to the public in the form of wood products
- native plant and wildlife habitat

Since their fortunes are on the line, the landowners have great incentives to provide for fire hazard reduction, erosion control and invasive species eradication to protect their investment. Their neighbors are also beneficiaries of these endeavors.

Working lands provide private sector jobs that are not funded by your tax dollars. The forestry sector jobs include: timber fallers, heavy equipment operators, mill workers, mechanics, truckers, forestry

professionals, geologists, soil engineers, civil engineers, road construction and maintenance workers and accountants.

Working private lands and the businesses they support pay taxes. They do this in the form of:

- annual property taxes
- timber yield taxes
- payroll and income taxes for people working the land
- capital gains taxes

The proceeds of these taxes fund:

- schools
- roads
- public safety services like fire protection and police
- welfare services
- parks
- libraries

In today's stretched times, it remains important to keep the tax base as wide as possible. Many hands make light work, and any action that removes a parcel from the tax base or reduces its value adversely affects the remaining parcels in the system.

Conservation easements are used by landowners to reduce the value of the land, generally for tax reduction purposes. This forces the remainder of the tax base to find a way to make up the lost revenue, generally through higher taxes on the remaining taxable parcels and increased fees for services. Parkland conversions remove land from the tax base entirely and force the public to finance its maintenance, which is a double-whammy. Since the county is already having trouble maintaining its existing parks, this action would be irresponsible.

Organizations and individuals who oppose working lands are advocating conservation easements and conversions to public land, but are not offering any solutions that would replace the revenues lost from the tax base when land is converted to parks or reduced in value by conservation easements.

We believe the Resolution Supporting the Santa Cruz County Working Lands Resolution is sufficient as it stands and we look forward to partnering with the county in future endeavors that protect our businesses, social services and environment together to build a sustainable future.

Sincerely,

Member of Central Coast Forest Association Board of Directors