



Protecting Marin Since 1934

June 7, 2010

Marin County Parks Commission  
3501 Civic Center Drive  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Subject: Input to Expenditure Plan for Proposed Open Space and Agricultural Ballot Measure

Dear Commission:

Marin Conservation League appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Commission at the June 7, 2012, meeting, when you will consider how revenues from a sales tax measure might be expended if approved by the voters. Our comments assume that the proposed sales tax could be set at either one-eighth or one-quarter cent, and that revenues would be allocated in a roughly 20% (agricultural easements) - 70% (Marin County Parks) - 10 % (local town and city parks) split. Our focus is on the approximate 70% that would be allocated to fulfill the needs of Marin County Parks Department. Our comments are general at this stage, and are supported by recommendations contained in the document "Community Marin."<sup>1</sup>

We previously wrote to the Board of Supervisors stating our concurrence with the Parks Department's needs, and gave qualified support of a ballot measure, pending the favorable outcome of a new voter poll and an acceptable Expenditure Plan. We hope that the survey will provide guidance on the level of tax increase the public is likely to support, and we request that the Expenditure Plan reflect the strong resource protection policies that have always governed the Department's system of Open Space Preserves.

The Commission can look to several sources to determine how tax revenues might be expended: 1) Department staff outlined three broad priority areas of need (Environmental Maintenance, Healthy Parks and Healthy People, and Preservation Initiative); these overlap somewhat the allocations to agricultural preservation and local parks in the first paragraph above; 2) The 2008 Strategic Plan should provide the principal basis on which to allocate

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<sup>1</sup>*Community Marin* is a consensus document that presents recommendations for a comprehensive environmental plan for the County. The principal authors are Marin Conservation League, Marin Audubon Society, Marin Baylands Advocates, and Sierra Club Marin Group. First written in 1991, it is completing its third update.

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Department funds; 3) Further direction will come from the Vegetation Management Plan and Roads and Trails Management Plan when they are completed; and 4) Meetings such as this one will yield further suggestions, but they should be consistent with adopted Department policies.

As further guidance we want to reinforce certain goals and strategies contained in the Strategic Plan that, in our view, should dictate how the limited funds from a tax measure could be expended.

1. Preserve Natural Systems. Goal 1 in the Strategic Plan (Chapter 3) is as follows: “Protect, restore, and preserve the natural systems of the lands held in trust for current and future generations.” This is a fundamental priority for determining the use of funds. We agree with the strategies and actions listed on Page 35 of the Strategic Plan that support this primary goal.
2. Protect and maintain existing resources and facilities. The 2008 Strategic Plan begins with “big picture” themes such as: “Take good care of what we already have.” This theme is consistent with Goal 1 and the strategies and actions listed. The “stewardship” of existing resources should have high priority for funding.
3. Acquire priority undeveloped areas. Goal 2 in the Strategic Plan contains two distinctly different concepts of “growth” – one points to acquisition of priority areas that currently are unprotected; and the other encourages expansion of trails and pathways (see Item 4. below). We encourage the first, i.e., acquisition of unprotected lands using all possible tools and partnerships to make this possible. The Department has identified critical lands that should be added to the system of Preserves; funds should be allocated to enable acquiring these long-sought lands by a variety of creative means, such as matching funds for ABAG Priority Conservation Areas in Marin.
4. Consider funding “new” trails based on policy of “no net increase in system trails”. Absent acquisition of new lands, the current density of trails on existing preserves already exceeds optimum densities for adequate maintenance and protection of natural resources, as well as ability to patrol and enforce rules, as compared to other open space districts. Therefore, any funds considered for expansion of trails and pathways should be matched by funds to decommission both system and non-system trail segments such that current densities of system trails are not increased. Any new shared-use trails should be considered only where strict criteria of need, site suitability, and safety have been established. This is consistent with Strategic Plan actions directed to protecting wildlife habitats and corridors, sensitive species, erosion and water quality, and other aspects of environmental quality. Safety of all users and enforcement of regulations are not addressed well in the Strategic Plan, however.

5. Support programs that foster learning and stewardship. *Community Marin* encourages volunteer stewardship programs and coordination of such programs with other land management agencies. The Marin County Parks District has shown strong and effective use of volunteers and in educational programs. Funding for these efforts should be included in an Expenditure Plan.
6. Continue system-wide vegetation management to control invasive species. This long-term investment of staff resources should be specifically called out in an Expenditure Plan. In our view, invasive species constitute one of the greatest threats to the future condition of the preserves. The ongoing battle to balance fuel reduction techniques with prevention of further expansion of invasive species will continue to take up valuable staff resources.

This brief statement of priorities that should be reflected in the Expenditure Plan favors the open space preserves. We also acknowledge that the Department operates a huge system of parks and other facilities for active recreation, and funds must also be allocated to maintain these popular and heavily used facilities. We do not have a specific recommendation for allocating funds between these two responsibilities of the Department. However, the system of preserves has helped to shape Marin and its communities. It constitutes a long-term investment for the benefit of future as well as present generations. Once land is lost, it cannot be recovered! Hence our emphasis is on funding the continued preservation and acquisition of open space lands.

Sincerely,



Susan Stompe,  
President



Nona Dennis,  
Chair, Parks and Open Space Committee

cc: Steve Kinsey, President, Marin County Board of Supervisors  
Supervisor Susan Adams  
Supervisor Judy Arnold  
Supervisor Katie Rice  
Supervisor Kate Sears