

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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April 4, 2005

Greg Smith
City of Thousand Oaks
2100 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, California 91362

Mont Clef Ridge DEIR Comments
SCH# 2004041074, HPD 2002-80

Dear Mr. Smith:

The Conservancy appreciates the City's stewardship of a generally well done Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). We concur with the DEIR conclusion that the proposed project, and the two DEIR alternatives that also include four home sites, would result in unavoidable, significant adverse impacts to wildlife movement because of the access driveway and its associated grading.

It may be the case that adequate wildlife movement could occur over the centuries through the gap that would result from a combination of the "Reduced Pad Area Alternative" and "Site Plan Revision Submitted by the Project Engineer Alternative." However, to achieve that consistent level of function, pets, people, lighting, landscaping, and fuel modification would have to be controlled at a level beyond the operational and economic feasibility of the responsible public agency with the conservation easement or fee title. Agencies should plan for the case of ongoing erosion of natural values on private open space within all wildlife movement corridors.

Nonetheless, if the City is compelled by outside sources to approve a dwelling on each of the four existing parcels, that approval should reflect the project that best avoids wildlife corridor impacts. That alternative project is a combination of the "Reduced Pad Area Alternative" and "Site Plan Revision Submitted by the Project Engineer Alternative" which maximizes the width of the corridor and minimizes fuel modification within its most narrow points. Every square meter of extra land that can be permanently protected increases the longterm potential capability of the corridor.

This suggested combination alternative would be enhanced if significant portions of each lot were required to be dedicated as fee simple open space to a public agency, as opposed to a conservation easement. That distinction provides a much greater guarantee that violations of the restricted conditions will not occur, and increases the ease of enforcing the conditions. The fee simple portions of lots four and two should include their entire interface along the

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proposed access road. Conservation easements should also be required on all those areas not included in the fee simple dedication area. Likewise, if biological conditions permit it, the City may one day want to put a limited use trail along the ridge. In which case a trail easement should also be retained across the proposed driveway.

We also concur with the DEIR conclusion that the environmentally superior alternative is “Acquisition of Lots 1 and 2 as Permanent Open Space.” If the City is not compelled by outside sources to approve one house on each of the four subject parcels, the FEIR could include an additional alternative to cluster four houses in the “non-proposed conservation easement area” for Lots 3 and 4. That solution would require no public funding. The Conservancy will continue to work with all parties involved to ensure that an adequate wildlife movement corridor is permanently protected.

In any case the FEIR should include all of the prohibitions and restrictions to be included in the conservation easement areas. The public agency’s remedies for violations should be greatly in favor of the agency. Ideally a draft of such an agreement would be included to ensure that adequate protection is contemplated and can be legally achieved. Per the Conservancy’s Notice of Preparation comments, we urge that the FEIR include much specific and enforceable conditions on lighting including landscape-low voltage lighting. All the gains of extra feet of corridor width can be extinguished by wildlife unfriendly lighting. The sides of the houses facing the wildlife corridor and conservation easement areas should have much greater restrictions. Conversely, for example, the north sides of houses on Lots 1 and 2, and the south sides of Lots 3 and 4 should have reduced restrictions. The conservation easement, the EIR mitigation measures, and the Conditions of Approval must include enforceable restrictions on the spillage of light from the homes. The limits must be easily measurable to be meaningful.

The Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to comment. Please direct any questions or future documents to Paul Edelman of our staff at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128 and at the above Ramirez Canyon Park address.

Sincerely,

ELIZABETH A. CHEADLE
Chairperson