

**SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY**

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK  
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD  
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265  
PHONE (310) 589-3200  
FAX (310) 589-3207



April 27, 2009

Mike Kamino  
Planning Department  
City of Agoura Hills  
30001 Ladyface Court  
Agoura Hills, California 91301

**Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Office Project  
Notice of Consultation Comments**

Dear Mr. Kamino:

The proposed project on 66 acres is situated between two large open space parcels owned and managed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). The volcanic substrate on the north-facing slope of Ladyface Mountain supports ecologically unique and aesthetically rich landscapes and micro-sites. As was the case with the approved development project on the property immediately to the east, virtually every square meter of the subject parcel supports an uncommon plant and/or lichen species assemblage. Because of the site's ecological diversity and proximity to protected public open space, the project impact footprint should be as minimal as possible.

The proposed project design is to be complemented on its impact avoidance. The proposed three phase office project for the Foundation also includes numerous progressive project elements that should remain intact with the project design as it moves forward in the review process.

The overall site map shows a distinct red project boundary. Both the CEQA mitigation measures and the conditions of approval should require the dedication of a conservation easement for every portion of the site outside of this boundary to the MRCA. Such an easement will assure that the project footprint or ecological disturbance will not expand in any fashion. A short distance south of the most southern project element, the open space should be dedicated to the MRCA in fee simple.

Because of the steep incline along the south side of Agoura Road it has been difficult for existing projects not to leave artificial looking slopes visible from Agoura Road when winding access roads are cut to reach pad areas. In general, the unparalleled aesthetic qualities of the overall subject slope have been permanently decimated by exiting projects.

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The apparent high level of sensitivity of the applicant provides an opportunity to alter this trend. The greatest hurdle is the required wholesale widening of Agoura Road. Thirty feet of additional roadway cut into the steep volcanic slope guarantees several thousand feet of unsightly cut slopes with v-ditches. We hope the City shows a greater level of sensitivity and willingness to deviate from its transportation master plan. We suggest a compromise of just adding one, not two lanes to Agoura Road, to retain a semblance of its charm and significantly reduce the ecological and visual impacts of the proposed project. The Draft EIR should include a reduced Agoura Road widening alternative. Decision makers must see the benefits of avoiding such a major cut.

Furthermore the cut slopes visible from Agoura Road should be roughened and totally free of any visible v-ditches. The plant palette should exactly mimic what the grading replaced sans any non-native species. The required two to four year effort to create such a native plant community is worth it and we hope Agoura Hills is up to showing the innovation and patience to make it a project requirement.

We are intrigued by the proposed make over of a Los Angeles County-owned debris basin to become an ecologically diverse debris basin. We encourage the elimination of a maximum amount of impermeable surface. The CEQA documentation must be wholly honest about how much Los Angeles County will allow alteration of the facility.

The new proposed debris basin (east drainage) should be even more ecologically diverse and push the boundary of how minimally intrusive a debris basin can be. Our understanding is that the facility's design is wholly under the jurisdiction of the City and the California Department of Fish and Game. We encourage the applicant and City to create a new cost effective standard for a natural debris basin that maximizes mesic plant community habitat values. With declining rainfall levels, the natural capture and retention of precipitation becomes increasingly more important every year.

The Conservancy supports both the first flush underground cistern and its conversion to a pond if phase three is built. Please direct any questions and all future documents to Paul Edelman of our staff at the above address and by phone at 310-589-3200 ext. 128

Sincerely,

**DRAFT**

RONALD P. SHAFER  
Chairperson