



Gavin Newsom
Governor

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Governor's Office of Planning and Research
State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit



Kate Gordon
Director

July 12, 2019

RECEIVED

JUL 18 2019

COUNTY OF SOLANO
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Eric Wilberg
Solano County
675 Texas Street, Suite 5500
Fairfield, CA 94533

Subject: Monroe Ranch Use Permit
SCH#: 2019069044

Dear Eric Wilberg:

The State Clearinghouse submitted the above named NEG to selected state agencies for review. The review period closed on 7/11/2019, and the comments from the responding agency (ies) is (are) available on the CEQA database for your retrieval and use. If this comment package is not in order, please notify the State Clearinghouse immediately. Please refer to the project's ten-digit State Clearinghouse number in future correspondence so that we may respond promptly.

Please note that Section 21104(c) of the California Public Resources Code states that:

"A responsible or other public agency shall only make substantive comments regarding those activities involved in a project which are within an area of expertise of the agency or which are required to be carried out or approved by the agency. Those comments shall be supported by specific documentation."

Check the CEQA database for submitted comments for use in preparing your final environmental document: <https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/2019069044/2> . Should you need more information or clarification of the comments, we recommend that you contact the commenting agency directly.

This letter acknowledges that you have complied with the State Clearinghouse review requirements for draft environmental documents, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. Please contact the State Clearinghouse at (916) 445-0613 if you have any questions regarding the environmental review process.

Sincerely,

Scott Morgan
Director, State Clearinghouse

cc: Resources Agency



July 5, 2019

RECEIVED

JUL 10 2019

COUNTY OF SOLANO
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

VIA EMAIL: EJWILBERG@SOLANOCOUNTY.COM

Department of Resource Management
Planning Services Division
Attn: Eric Wilberg, Planning Associate
675 Texas Street
Fairfield, CA 94533

Dear Mr. Wilberg:

NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT A NEGATIVE DECLARATION FOR THE MONROE RANCH PROJECT, SCH# 2019069044

The Department of Conservation's (Department) Division of Land Resource Protection (Division) has reviewed the Notice of Intent to Adopt a Negative Declaration for the Monroe Ranch Project submitted by Solano County (County). The Division monitors farmland conversion on a statewide basis and administers the California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act and other agricultural land conservation programs. We offer the following comments and recommendations with respect to the proposed project's potential impacts on agricultural land and resources.

Project Description

The project involves the construction of a 4,000 square foot barn-styled accessory structure (event barn) to serve as a special event facility adjunct to the Suisun Valley Inn currently operating at the Monroe Ranch. The event barn would primarily host weddings on weekends during the summer months. A majority of the weddings are expected to have 150 or fewer attendees; however, some events would draw up to 250 persons. A wedding event at Monroe Ranch requires utilizing the entire facility which includes rental of the Suisun Valley Inn; therefore, the site is limited in capacity to host only one wedding per rented weekend.

In addition to weddings, the event barn would also accommodate other types of special events including corporate meetings and charitable events. These types of events would typically occur during a weekday with an anticipated attendance of up to 50 persons. The Suisun Valley Inn currently operates on-site as a Bed and Breakfast Inn. The Inn does not serve food, however, groups who rent the entire Inn may utilize the existing kitchen. The project would increase the available number of rooms for rent at the inn up to eight.

The subject site is located at 4400 Suisun Valley Road, two miles west of the City of Fairfield. The property is situated within an agricultural setting identified as the Suisun Valley Agricultural Region by the Solano County General Plan. Land surrounding the project is utilized for agricultural production, predominantly vineyard cultivation. The site borders agricultural land to the north and south, Suisun Creek to the east, and Suisun Valley Road to the west. The property is comprised of three parcels totaling 27.16 acres. Currently the project site is enrolled in a Williamson Act contract, and contains Prime Farmland, and Other Land as classified by the Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program.¹

Department Comments

As stated in the Initial Study/Negative Declaration:

The existing Bed and Breakfast Inn, including the expansion from six to eight bedrooms, as well as the proposed special events facility are conditionally permitted land uses with the Suisun Valley Agriculture "A-SV-20" Zoning District.

The Suisun Valley Strategic Plan (Page 2-2) recognized that some of the land uses allowed under the County's General Plan and the Suisun Valley Zoning Regulations are not consistent with the Williamson Act. Such activities include, but are not limited to: bed and breakfasts, hotels, resorts, restaurants, bakeries, and cafes.

The Plan recommended that landowners with the Williamson Act seeking to operate such uses need to file for nonrenewal on portions of the property where these activities would take place. Nonrenewal has been filed on the 3-acre portion of the property where the event barn and parking are proposed.²

According to Government Code Section 51231, "...the board or council, by resolution, shall adopt rules governing the administration of agricultural preserves, including procedures for initiating, filing, and processing requests to establish agricultural preserves. Rules related to compatible uses shall be consistent with the provisions of Section 51238.1." Solano County has established its own set of Uniform Rules and Procedures Governing Agricultural Preserves and Land Conservation Contracts (Williamson Act rules).

As previously stated in the Initial Study/Negative Declaration, the County is already aware that its Williamson Act rules are inconsistent with its General Plan and the Suisun Valley Zoning Regulations.

¹ California Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, California Important Farmland Finder, <https://maps.conservancy.ca.gov/DLRP/CIFF/>, 2016.

² Initial Study and Negative Declaration Monroe Ranch Use Permit U-18-03, <http://solanocounty.com/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?BlobID=30448>, page 18.

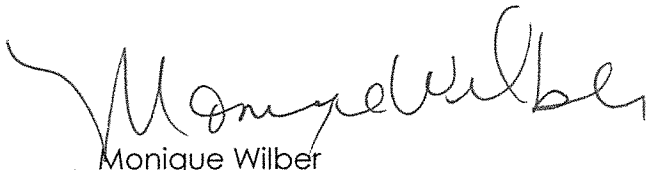
Conclusion

The Department recommends the County consider the following prior to approving the proposed project:

- Compatibility of existing (Bed and Breakfast), and proposed (Event Facility) land use with County establish Williamson Act rules and procedures, and Government Code Section 51238.1; and
- Allow proposed project site to finish the Williamson Act Nonrenewal process before approving proposed land use; or
- Partial cancellation of Williamson Act contract on proposed project site, removing any doubt of compatibility with the Williamson Act.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Intent to Adopt a Negative Declaration for the Monroe Ranch Project. Please provide this Department with notices of any future hearing dates as well as any staff reports pertaining to this project. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Farl Grundy, Environmental Planner at (916) 324-7347 or via email at Farl.Grundy@conservation.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monique Wilber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Monique Wilber
Conservation Program Support Supervisor

Wilberg, Eric J.

From: Casas, Michael E@DOT <Michael.Casas@dot.ca.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, July 9, 2019 1:09 PM
To: Wilberg, Eric J.
Subject: Monroe Ranch Use Permit (U-18-03)

Dear Eric Wilberg:

Caltrans would like to inform you that at this time we have “no comments and no concerns, but please keep us apprised of any updates regarding this project.”

Thank you,

Michael Casas

Local Development Intergovernmental Review

Transportation Planning Student Assistant

Caltrans – District 4

Local Development-Intergovernmental Review

Phone: (510) 286-5614 | **Email:** Michael.Casas@dot.ca.gov



Wilberg, Eric J.

From: Rich Zimmerman <razzim@ix.netcom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 16, 2019 11:20 AM
To: Wilberg, Eric J.
Subject: Use Permit U-18-03 IS/ND Comments
Attachments: RAZ Comemnts U-18-03 Monroe Ranch.pdf

Eric,

At long last I've been able to put together my comments on this IS/ND. My comments are on Sections 2,12 Noise and 2.16 Traffic and Transportation.

I find that the traffic analysis submitted by the Applicant is insufficient to make a Neg Dec decision. I further find that Section 2.16 Traffic must include a finding that there are potential impacts from periodic noise that would be less than significant with appropriate mitigation measures.

I hope that my comments make sense and that there aren't too many typos..Writing on an iPad without a keyboard and limited internet access was an experience!

Please contact me if you have any questions or require additional information. I look forward to commenting on the Conditional Use Permit when it comes up for public review.

Regards,

Rich Zimmerman
4323 Cadenasso Ln
Fairfield CA 94534-9629
(707) 864-0185
razzim@ix.netcom.com

I. Comments on IS/ND Section 2.16 Transportation and Traffic

The Department does not have sufficient data to make any Neg Dec or EIR decision on the traffic impact of the Project within Suisun Valley or more specifically on Suisun Valley Road. The traffic study submitted by the Applicant is incompetent and its conclusions are of no value in making a traffic impact decision.

The data for the Applicant's traffic study was collected during January, the quietest traffic month of the year on Suisun Valley Road and the wrong time of year to evaluate the impact of tourism and event traffic in Suisun Valley. The study attempts to rectify a faulty data set by extrapolating the relative seasonal change in traffic volume from Caltrans Annual Volume Data for the intersection of Highway 121 and Wooden Valley Road to the data collected for Suisun Valley Road in front of the proposed Project. Traffic volume the Wooden Valley Road / Highway 121 intersection does not adequately assess the traffic volume on Suisun Valley Road below the intersection with Twin Sisters Road. The Caltrans data only reflects vehicles going to or from either Napa or Lake Berryessa. It does not reflect mid to upper-valley traffic dynamics on Suisun Valley Road originating from or turning onto Mankas Corner Road, Ledgewood Road, Rockville Road and Interstate 80. Such traffic is travelling to and from destinations such as Suisun Valley School, Larry's Produce, the several wineries, restaurants and shops on Suisun Valley Road and Mankas Corner Road, and the residential neighborhoods of Rancho Solano and north-west Fairfield. This significant local and tourist traffic is not included in the extrapolation used in the Applicant's traffic study. Consequently, the extrapolation and resulting conclusions are incompetent and cannot be used to make an EIR or Neg Dec decision.

The Applicant's traffic study does not adequately address the cumulative impact of events uses on traffic dynamics within Suisun Valley including existing uses, currently approved but not yet operating uses, and the likely expansion of existing and new events uses. The report's analysis of future traffic demand is based on projections from the Napa-Solano Regional Travel Demand Model for the Year 2040. That Demand Model is a regional model based on population and jobs growth to provide a description of existing travel patterns from which a prediction of future travel patterns has been made. This model is based on overall population growth and neither contemplates nor address a localized phenomenon such as the recent extraordinary expansion of events uses in Suisun Valley. The Travel Demand Data Model is inadequate for predicting traffic dynamics resulting from multiple concurrent events occurring in Suisun Valley.

The cumulative traffic impacts from the recent expansion of events uses in Suisun Valley has not been adequately addressed in any study. Each individual project has been evaluated as an isolated entity yet all of the existing and planned events uses propose concurrent weekend afternoon and evening events during warm weather months. The traffic impacts of such concentrated events use will be consequential yet the cumulative effect on traffic has not been

addressed for this or any other recently approved events use project in Suisun Valley. In the relatively near future, multiple concurrent events uses, coupled with population growth and traffic diverting apps such as WAZE will result in congested conditions throughout Suisun Valley.

The traffic analysis submitted for the IS/ND review of this Project is incompetent and incomplete. A Neg Dec or EIR cannot be issued for this Project until a competent and comprehensive traffic analysis is completed by the Applicant and submitted to the Department for review. Additionally, no environmental review of this or other traffic generating use in Suisun Valley can be approved until an assessment of the cumulative impact of all existing approved and proposed uses has been evaluated.

II. Comments on IS/ND Section 2.12, Noise

The Impact Discussion for Section 2.12, Noise indicates that the potential noise sources in Checklist Items a.) through d.) are less than significant yet mitigation by containment is discussed as appropriate for containment of otherwise fugitive sound. Noise is a fugitive trespass once it leaves the boundaries of an event property. It is the most significant environmental effect arising from events centers hosting social events, e.g. weddings, in rural Solano County and is the source of most complaints against such operations.

There is a conflict between the General Plan community maximum noise exposure criteria of 75 dBA and the maximum noise criteria for a Special Events Facility pursuant to County Code section 28.73.30(B)(6)(a)(5)(ii) which specifies 65 dB for outdoor amplified sound when measured at the property lines. The lower decibel limit of 65 dB is applicable to this IS/ND.

Section 2.12, Noise, of the IS/ND indicates that the analysis for noise assessment categories a.) through d.) have "less than significant impact." Nevertheless, the analysis for Section 2.12, Temporary or Periodic Increase in Ambient Noise Levels, is flawed.

Part of the analysis of potential periodic noise impacts appears to be based on statements contained within the Use Permit Application. Some of these statements are erroneous and have a significant impact on Neg Dec Section 2.12 Noise Analysis. Additionally, The Noise Impacts Discussion states that "Social gatherings will be held indoors within the event barn and suppress noise levels from extending beyond parcel boundaries." This statement is unsubstantiated by the Use Permit Application or any other information available on the publicly accessible website documentation for the IS/ND

Use Permit Application Section 5(J), Existing Conditions, states "Distance to nearest residence(s) or other adjacent use(s): 1/2 mile to nearest neighbor, other than self. Furthermore, Use Permit Application Section 9(H), Additional Comments, states that "... we are in a remote area and the nearest home is half a mile away." To the contrary, there are residences to the north-east and east-south-east less than ½ mile from the Project site. My house is approximately 1,200 ft east-south-east of the existing bed-and-breakfast structure and will be even closer to the proposed events barn.

Use Permit Application Section 7(B)(14), Noise Generating Operations on Site, states: "Music during events until 11:00 PM". This is in violation of County regulations for special events require that all events cease by 10:00 p.m. and that all guests shall be off the property by 10:30 p.m. (County Code section 28.73.30(B)(6)(a)(4)).

The Impacts Discussion states that "[s]ocial gatherings would be held indoors within the event barn and suppress noise levels from extending beyond parcel boundaries." This conclusion is erroneous. The type of event anticipated necessarily includes the use of amplified music and amplified public address (PA) systems. It is highly unlikely that such uses will be confined to an indoor space. The draw for holding an event in Suisun Valley is the ambience and bucolic nature of an agricultural setting. Wedding ceremonies will undoubtedly be held outdoors accompanied by music and PA. Although the source of amplified music for dancing etc. may be situated within the event barn, the structure will not suppress fugitive sound unless stringent measures are employed to contain it. Such measures would include vestibule entries and staff to ensure that doors remain closed. The Use Permit Application makes no mention of any proposed steps to mitigate fugitive sound.

The operators of Monroe Ranch / Suisun Valley Inn were granted an administrative permit to operate as a bed-and-breakfast. Such permit does not authorize special events yet the operation has held several outdoor weddings and social events including raucous parties, all with amplified music and PA that often continued at significant volume well after 10 PM.

In Conclusion, the IS/ND analysis for Section 2.12, Noise, must conclude that there is a strong potential for a noise impact on sensitive receptors arising from the proposed periodic social events. The determination for the Section 2.12(d), Periodic Noise Impacts, must be changed to "Less Than Significant with Mitigation." This would ensure that any Conditional Use Permit would contain appropriate and enforceable requirements for the suppression and control of fugitive noise arising from social events held at the proposed events center.

Wilberg, Eric J.

From: Mary Browning <mbrowning@valleyinternet.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 17, 2019 10:21 AM
To: Wilberg, Eric J.
Subject: Morgan Ranch Use Permit U-18-03

Hello Eric,

We spoke a few weeks ago about the Public Notice for the Morgan Ranch planned event barn. It is the same site and ownership as the Suisun Valley Inn, 4400 Suisun Valley Road. Public Notice stated that the property owner Gary Bacon had an existing parking contract with Solano Community College. I found out from Robert Diamond, the Risk Manager for SCC, that Gary Bacon had been mailed an application, but it was not signed and had never been used in the 3 years that he had it. Therefore, it was not a contract. When you and I spoke on the phone last month, you told me you had taken Gary Bacon's word for it, rather than personally verifying there was an actual contract or approved parking agreement.

Based upon this information, and the fact that Mr. Diamond told me he would deny any requests for parking for any alcohol related events, made me think this public notice was invalid, and Mr. Bacon's event barn proposal will have to be greatly revised to accommodate sufficient on-site parking. And that would result in the undesirable loss of more prime farmland.

Additionally, the 1 acre site proposed to be used for the event barn, is in fact the same quality of prime farmland as what exists all around it. Just because that one acre has not been tilled or planted, does not degrade the quality of that acre. Farmland in the Suisun Valley is supposed to be protected from development, if the County is serious about farmland protection.

Solano County should not act as the Lead Agency in determining if a proposed project impacts the environment. All event centers, no matter where they are located, have a negative impact on the environment because they draw hundreds of people per event, thus greatly impacts traffic, which impacts mobility and air quality, and events create man-made noise. The Morgan Ranch borders Ledgeewood Creek. All creeks and their associated riparian areas, serve as wildlife corridors. This also includes Mankas Corner. Suisun Valley is rich in wildlife, and the majority of it is never seen. Ledgeewood Creek is a direct link to the Suisun Marsh. Which is how a river otter came to Mankas Corner Road last Thursday evening at 6:30 pm, July 12th. I witnessed an adult river otter make its way from one vineyard to another, and nearly got struck by a pickup truck two car lengths in front of me. A river otter is capable of traveling up to 26 miles in one day. They are a native predator that has come back from the brink of extinction due to trapping for the fur trade, and now river otters are being spotted around the Bay Area, because habitat restoration projects are working. Any reasonable person would conclude without a doubt, that the river otter traveled Ledgeewood Creek right past the Morgan Ranch, and within sight of the proposed event barn site.

I have seen river otters before in Mendocino County, so I knew what it was. I just didn't know they existed here because of never seeing one before. So I searched online and read recent articles about otter sightings in Bay Area counties.

No good will come of developing the Suisun Valley into an urban commercial zone for tourists. I'm on the record for opposing the Airbnb use of the Suisun Valley Inn already. I have opposed event centers in Suisun Valley, as one of the "allowed uses" completely devoid of regulations (vague and unenforceable). It is obvious that Solano County is in violation of CEQA on numerous projects, not just this one. Never once has the County fully analyzed the negative impacts of the Suisun Valley Strategic Plan. It would serve you well to read the Draft Suisun Valley Plan, and then look at what has actually happened in Suisun Valley. Everything about the intent has changed, and the Plan basically became

obsolete upon arrival in 2008-2009. I have given interested people personal tours of the valley, and it is easy to recognize the obvious discrepancies.

I've provided information that you were not aware of. The information alters the facts for the public notice, and should alter your decisions that are based on false narrative and inaccurate Declaration of Negative Environmental Impact.

Although I missed the July 12th deadline for sending this email in opposition to the use permit, I had previously discussed my concerns with you.

Respectfully,

Mary Browning
5118 Clayton Rd.
Suisun Valley
(707)372-6262

Here is a clip from one online story: "This spring, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife released an updated map showing where river otters live in the Bay Area. The new map incorporates sightings from the Marin-based River Otter Ecology Project (ROEP). The otters' expansion here reflects the headway we've made in cleaning up waterways and restoring wetlands.

River otters are big eaters, and the fish, crayfish, and other prey they depend on need unpolluted water to thrive. "If there's enough food for river otters, there's a healthy environment too," said Sarah Allen, science program lead for the National Park Service Pacific West Region who is also on the ROEP advisory board. Another factor in the otters' recovery is restoration of their aquatic habitats, from freshwater streams and ponds to brackish lagoons and estuaries."