



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

-----The Ventana Chapter-----

P.O. Box 5667, Carmel, CA 93921

California Coastal Commission
45 Fremont Street
Suite 2000
San Francisco, CA 94105-2219

May 9, 2012

Re: Monterey County LCP Amendment No. MCO-1-12 Part 1 (Del Monte Forest LCP update and PBC Concept Plan)

Dear Chair Shallenberger and members

May 7, 2012

The Ventana Chapter of the Sierra Club represents 6,300 members and we have been following Pebble Beach Company expansion plans for almost 30 years. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the latest version of LCP Amendment for the CCC hearing scheduled for May 9 in San Rafael.

Sierra Club is very appreciative of the collaborative work done between the representatives of the Coastal Commission central coast staff, Pebble Beach Company and County staff since denial of the "Measure A" LCP amendment in 2007 which the Club opposed. While we agree with CCC staff report that the new PBC Concept Plan is overall a good compromise plan that protects coastal resources, we still have grave concerns for several areas designated for residential development. **These areas, labeled J, K and L are clustered close together in an Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) of Monterey Pine Forest in the Seal Rock Creek watershed and are thus not suitable for residential development under the Coastal Act.** All these areas contain rare Monterey Pine Forest and special status species. The Wetlands Research Associates surveys in 2002 cited in the FEIR reported observing two subadult federally-endangered California red-legged frogs (CRLF) on September 19 in a culvert plunge pool in this watershed. Because aquatic vegetation and undercut banks provide suitable coverage and egg mass attachment structures, it is assumed that CRLF is distributed throughout the Seal Rock Creek watershed.

Therefore, the Club requests only a few changes to the Concept Plan and they are supported by the CCC staff report specifically on pages 56-62 although more careful analysis occurs throughout the document. These

changes are to deny any development in Areas J, K, and L in the Seal Rock Creek watershed which cumulatively have **23** residential lots proposed on **40 acres**. It is interesting to note that while the previous "Measure A" plan overall had more development, these 3 Areas had cumulatively only **4** lots proposed for housing (J had 3 and K had 1) in 2007. Also, US Fish and Wildlife stated in a letter in 2004 that while the "California red-legged frog had been documented from the Monterey Peninsula at least as early as 1907, they were unaware of any recent sightings until surveys in 2002 located California red-legged frogs along Seal Rock Creek ponds within the Spyglass Hill golf course and two frog sightings within the boundary of the proposed golf course."

The Concept Plan DEIR (3.3 Pgs. 69-72) states that the lower portion of Seal Rock Creek appears to be the center of the known Del Monte Forest population of CRLF. It presents several ambitious mitigation programs to expand habitat including hiring ecologists/biologists to design, construct and monitor new suitable breeding habitat. It states that "If CRLF are found, **capture and relocate** to nearby suitable habitat within a preservation area to encourage perpetuation of the individual and species." However, this may not be scientific nor protect the species from extirpation. Studies show that the long-term probability of the survival and recovery of the California red-legged frog is dependent upon the protection of **existing** breeding habitat and associated uplands. (Fellers and Kleeman 2005, pp. 1, 17-18).

It should also be noted that other parcels in and adjacent to this watershed, Areas I-1, F-1, F-3, N and O and portions of U and V are now all proposed for preservation so the addition of J, K and L together with Spyglass Hill golf course, would create a large nearly contiguous area of open space and rare forest habitat for CRLF. This could greatly enhance survival for the CRLF and possibly bring praise to the Pebble Beach Company for encouraging and contributing to the recovery of CRLF.

In addition to the benefit of preserving Areas J, K and L for CRLF, we wish these lots set aside because they are prime ESHA, contain robust stands of rare Monterey Pine Forest, include coastal dune habitat and contain many federally- and state-endangered and special species native plants and wildlife such as Yaden's piperia, Hickman's cinquefoil, Menzies wallflower, Pacific Grove clover, Monterey spineflower, white tailed kite, Monterey shrew and pallid bat.

- **LUP Planning Area J** is a 9.38 acre site which consists of intact Monterey Pine Forest, dense Manzanita and oak trees supports a large population of federally listed Yaden's piperia (2500 plants). This parcel also includes two forks of Seal Rock Creek which was identified as a center for CPLF populations in the Del Monte Forest. Also, the wet areas in Area J are considered wetlands under the Coastal Act. California has lost 95% of its original wetlands so these areas are considered extremely rare habitat in the Forest. We oppose development in Area J as the wide ranging movement of

breeding CRLF would be negatively impacted by the proposed residential development for 5 single-family lots in Area J and could extirpate this population.

- **LUP Planning Area K** is a 10.62 acre site which consists of 2 parcels to be subdivided into 8 lots at Stevenson Drive which contains a very high density of Yadon piperia habitat with over 5900 plants. A Seal Rock Creek tributary crosses part of the site and there is broad, nearly level section of the site that acts as a flood plain, is seasonably wet and contains wetland indicator plants and thus comprises a third-acre seasonable wetland protected under the Coastal Act. Also, CRLF have been observed along the main Area K drainage. Like Area J, this parcel is ESHA under the Coastal Act. Rare Monterey Pine Forest habitat, CRLF breeding grounds and robust populations of Yadons' piperia would be negatively impacted by this by this LUP amendment permitting residential development at Area K.

- **LUP Planning Area L** is a 20 acre site that comprises the third segment of the 3 ESHA parcels threatened by development in the Seal Rock Creek watershed. Area L contains dense Monterey Pine Forest habitat and a small dunes area which has three special status plant species including Monterey spineflower, Menzie's wallflower and Monterey Indian paintbrush as well as federally-endangered Smith's blue butterfly habitat. Area L is adjacent to the Indian Village preservation area which contains one of the only two known extant populations of federally- and state-listed Hickman's cinquefoil (the other is near Devil's Slide in San Mateo County) and state-listed Pacific Grove clover. The potential impacts of such development on these rare plant populations at Indian Village need to be addressed.

Several Seal Rock Creek channels cross the eastern portion of Area L which as above has been identified as an apparent center for CRLF. Delineated wetlands protected by the Coastal Act occur at a one-acre site where 2 creeks converge from nearby Area J. The proposed LUP amendment provides for protection of about half the acreage but allows for development of 10 residential lots. All of Area L should have priority for preservation in the LUP in order to comply with the Coastal Act EHSA and wetland policies.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the process of improving this project by denying approval of residential development in Areas J, K and L.

Very truly yours,

Kevin Collins
Ventana Chapter Conservation Committee (RD/BBE)
cc: Tom Lippe, Lippe Gaffney Wagner LLP, San Francisco, CA
Rita Dalessio