



December 18, 2006

Mr. Gregg Manning, Chair
Executive Governing Committee
East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan Association (HCPA)
C/o Contra Costa County Community Development Department
651 Pine Street, North Wing, 4th Floor
Martinez, CA 94533

Re: Final East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan / Natural Community
Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP)

Dear Mr. Manning:

Our respective organizations have participated in the development of the HCP/NCCP over the last several years in a variety of ways: as members of the HCPA Coordination Group, by commenting on the Draft HCP/NCCP, and by participating in the various meetings and public discussions that have occurred during the five years of planning that preceded the Final HCP/NCCP. We have appreciated the open and iterative planning process employed by the HCPA, and welcomed the opportunity to help shape the document over the years.

Though none of the undersigned organizations would claim satisfaction with all aspects of the Final HCP/NCCP, we recognize that it was necessary in some instances to balance competing interests. Further, we believe the Final HCP/NCCP goes beyond striking a compromise and, as further described below, offers tangible benefits for the environment, economic development, private property holders, and the public at large.

Consequently, we respectfully urge the approval of the Final East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan / Natural Community Conservation Plan.

We believe the HCP/NCCP will benefit the diverse interests represented in this letter by helping to achieve the following key goals described in the supporting materials to the Plan:

- Purchase, restore, and permanently protect large interconnected and biologically rich blocks of habitat;
- Redirect money away from the process of permitting and toward the conservation of resources.

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- Improve regulatory certainty and permitting efficiency for regulators and project proponents;
- Provide fair compensation to willing landowners for permanent protection of resources on their land;

In addition, we wish to emphasize the following attributes of the HCP/NCCP important to one or more of the undersigned:

- Having an approved HCP/NCCP will enable local agencies in east Contra Costa County to receive state and federal conservation funds that would otherwise pass them by. For example, the U.S. Department of the Interior issues HCP Land Acquisition Grants each year, and the East Contra Costa County HCP/NCCP has already been awarded a \$6.5 million grant from this source.
- Funding and fee allocations in the HCP/NCCP were based on the principle that future development should pay a share of the costs proportional to its share of impacts.
- The HCP/NCCP uses economic incentives to conserve resources on private lands.
- The HCP/NCCP will enable local control of species permitting, will provide “no surprises” assurances from the state and federal governments, and will bring a regional context to the question of what resources should be protected.
- The HCP/NCCP will help to ensure that species and habitats are preserved in a coordinated manner that facilitates preservation of habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors, that enables thorough and effective biological monitoring and adaptive management, and that targets the most rare and sensitive resources for acquisition and restoration.
- The Plan respects the needs of agriculture by avoiding substantial land acquisition and crop restriction requirements in the intensively cultivated areas of eastern Contra Costa County and by proposing to rely on grazing as a key habitat management tool.
- The HCP/NCCP will provide permits for needed public infrastructure projects, including new and expanded roads and highways and flood control facilities.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We hope you will consider approving the HCP/NCCP and we look forward to working with you further on its successful implementation.

Sincerely,

Christina Wong
East Bay Field Representative
Greenbelt Alliance