



SONOMA LAND TRUST

September 30, 2010

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

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Supervisor Mike Kerns, 2nd District, mkerns@sonoma-county.org

Supervisor Shirlee Zane, 3rd District, szane@sonoma-county.org

Supervisor Paul Kelley, 4th District, pkelley@sonoma-county.org

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Subject: Proposed Roblar Road Gravel Quarry/ Roblar Ranch Conservation Easement

Dear Members of the Board of Supervisors,

The Sonoma Land Trust does not have a position on the proposed gravel quarry on Roblar Road as such, but we are very concerned about the alternative of running the access road to the proposed quarry through a property protected with a conservation easement.

Our concern is for the integrity of the overall system of conservation easements and land protection in Sonoma County and beyond. Between the Sonoma Land Trust and the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, more than 80,000 acres of scenic, agricultural and wild land throughout Sonoma County is permanently protected with conservation easements. The District has spent many millions of dollars to purchase these easements. If we are to continue to protect the open landscapes that we treasure in Sonoma County – the forests on the North Coast, the pasture land in the dairy belt, the views of Sonoma Mountain and the woodlands in the Mayacamas – we will need to do so with conservation easements. They are a practical alternative to fee acquisitions because they protect public values while leaving responsibility for managing protected land in private hands. But they depend on a promise.

The promise of conservation easements – a promise to the taxpayers who fund the purchases and to donors who gift easements – is that they are permanent – “in perpetuity.” Conservation easements are designed to be more than regulations that can be changed every election cycle. Tampering with this promise breeds cynicism and imperils the whole land conservation system. We realize that what is proposed is meant to be “temporary,” but when it comes to remunerative land uses, “temporary” seldom is. Some healthy skepticism is in order.

We believe that approval of a road through the Roblar Road conservation easement would do incalculable harm to the integrity and credibility of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and the Sonoma Land Trust's efforts to protect land with conservation easements. We urge you not to tamper with the Roblar Road conservation easement.

Sincerely,



Ralph Benson
Executive Director

Copy to:

Bill Keene, General Manager, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District