



**Sonoma Land Trust Files Suit to Prevent Port Sonoma Marina
from Dumping Dredge Material on Scenic Ranch
Protected with Conservation Easement
September 26, 2006**

Sonoma Land Trust filed a lawsuit in Sonoma County Superior Court on Friday, September 22, to stop the privately owned Port Sonoma marina from dumping dredge material on a scenic 528 acre ranch along Highway 37 near the mouth of the Petaluma River. (See map attached.) The ranch, known as Lower Ranch, is protected with a conservation easement that permanently restricts the use of the land to agriculture. The land has been a hay farm for over 100 years.

Sonoma Land Trust purchased Lower Ranch in 1986 to prevent it from being developed for any purpose other than agriculture. In 1989 the Land Trust sold the ranch, retaining a conservation easement which requires that the land be used permanently and exclusively for agriculture. Subsequently, the owners of the Port Sonoma marina which is located across Highway 37 acquired the ranch subject to the restrictive conservation easement.

Port Sonoma indicated to the Trust that it plans to dump as much as 5.4 million cubic yards of dredge material on Lower Ranch and raise the elevation of the land as much as five feet. The Land Trust fears that the salty mud will degrade the quality of the soil, cause flooding and render the land unsuitable for continued farming.

Sonoma Land Trust Executive Director Ralph Benson said, "Many years and enormous public investment have gone into protecting the Sonoma Baylands - Sonoma County's beautiful, open, gateway landscape along Highway 37. Using Lower Ranch as a facility for dumping mud isn't agriculture. Whatever projects Port Sonoma pursues should not be at the expense of the protected land around the marina. We like to get along with our neighbors, but we also have an obligation to our supporters and the public to enforce our conservation easements."



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Sonoma Baylands Region



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