



Sonoma County Planning Commission STAFF REPORT

DATE: July 16, 2020
TIME: 1:20 PM
STAFF: Richard Stabler, Senior Environmental Specialist

The Board of Supervisors will hold a noticed public hearing at a later date.

SUMMARY

Property Owner: Albert and Joseph Bordessa

Applicant: Sonoma County Regional Parks

Address: 17000 Valley Ford Cutoff, Valley Ford

Supervisorial District: 5th

APN: 026-030-011

Description: The project would establish two pedestrian/hiker-only trail corridors with associated staging areas (trailheads/parking lots) that would allow for low-intensity public access to pursue outdoor, recreational, and educational uses. Future uses may include hiking, nature study, bird watching, sightseeing, picnicking, outdoor education, docent led tours, scientific research and observation, and other similar uses. Allowable uses may also include limited, seasonal walk-in access to the Estero for pedestrians and hand-carried, non-motorized boats, such as kayaks and canoes.

CEQA Review: Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

General Plan Land Use: Land Extensive Agriculture 160/640 (LEA – 160 acre density, 640 acre minimum parcel size)

Specific/Area Plan: Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan (LCP)

Ordinance Reference: N/A

Zoning: LEA CC (Land Extensive Agriculture - Coastal), RC 100/50 (Riparian Corridor), SR (Scenic Resource - Scenic Landscape Unit), BH (Biotic Habitat)



RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a public hearing on the Estero Trail Draft Environmental Impact Report, receive testimony, and continue the meeting, directing staff to prepare a Final Environmental Impact Report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared to evaluate the potential adverse effects on the local and regional environment associated with the proposed Estero Trail Easement: Designation of Trail Corridors and Associated Staging Areas and Construction and Operation of Recreational Amenities Project (proposed project). The Draft EIR was published on December 11, 2019, followed by a 45-day public review period that was later extended to February 28, 2020 to accommodate the review process. The Draft EIR concluded that most environmental impacts of the project would be mitigated to a less than significant level, with the exception of traffic. The Planning Commission hearing will provide an additional opportunity to receive comments on the Draft EIR. Following the Planning Commission hearing, Regional Parks will prepare written responses to all comments received during the public review period and at the Planning Commission hearing. The Final EIR (Draft EIR plus written responses to comments) will be scheduled for a second Planning Commission hearing where the commission will be asked to provide their recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

PROJECT SITE AND CONTEXT

Background

The proposed project site is located in western unincorporated Sonoma County, north of Marin County and west of the cities of Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, and Rohnert Park. The project site is located on the Bordessa Ranch property at 17000 Valley Ford Cutoff approximately one mile south of Bodega, 2.5 miles west of Valley Ford, State Route 1 (SR 1) to the north, and the Estero Americano to the south.

The elevation of the project site ranges from sea level at the Estero to about 400 feet at the highest knoll on the northwestern corner of the site. The topography is characterized as rolling hills with a central valley created by drainage into the Estero at the southern end of the site. The undeveloped parts of the project site consist of gently to steeply sloped hillsides, with annual grassland, rocky outcrops, stock ponds, springs, and hillside seeps. In addition, a perennial creek and several smaller drainages are located on the property. These drainages, as well as one of the stock ponds, support riparian vegetation and eucalyptus groves.

The Bordessa Ranch property is currently used as grazing and breeding land for cattle and contains a large barn, sheds and outbuildings, a gravel access road, fencing, a concrete water tank, spring boxes and concrete water troughs, and two 2,500-gallon above-ground water tanks. With the exception of the agricultural facilities, the remainder of the site is undeveloped and cattle are present throughout the site.



Area Context and Surrounding Land Uses

Adjacent land uses to the approximately 500-acre Bordessa Ranch property are mostly primarily rural agricultural with the Sonoma Coast Villa Resort & Spa located across SR 1 generally north of the site.

Direction	Land Uses
North	Land Extensive Agriculture 160/640
South	Estero Americano/Marin County
East	Land Extensive Agriculture 160/640
West	Land Extensive Agriculture 160/640

Significant Applications Nearby

There are no significant applications pending within the project vicinity.

Access

Access to the project site is from a one-lane gravel/dirt access road off SR 1. A metal gate is located approximately 450 feet from the highway that is typically closed restricting access to the property. The approximately 0.4-mile long gravel road ends at a large wooden barn with a smaller agricultural workshop located to the northwest.

Wildfire Risk

The project site is located in an area designated as a moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zone (CAL FIRE 2007). There are no Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones designated near the project site.

Water/Wastewater/Utilities

Currently the property is on a well and septic system and is served by Pacific Gas and Electric for electrical power. The proposed project would provide portable toilets with privacy screening but would not provide potable water for public use.

Agricultural Conditions/Land Encumbrances/Contracts

The Bordessa Ranch property it is an active ranch used for breeding and grazing cattle. The existing structures supporting agricultural uses on the site include the barn, sheds and outbuildings, concrete water tank and troughs, spring boxes, and above-ground water tanks.

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (District) have a conservation easement and trail easement over the property owned by Alfred and Joseph Bordessa. The purpose of the Conservation Easement is to preserve and protect the conservation values of the property, including natural resources, habitat connectivity, open space and scenic views, agricultural resources, recreation, and education. The purpose of the Trail Easement is to ensure that trail corridors and associated staging areas are established and made available to the public in perpetuity for low-intensity public outdoor recreational and educational purposes consistent with the purpose of the Conservation Easement to preserve and protect natural resources, habitat connectivity, open space and scenic views, and agricultural resources.



Other Environmental Conditions

No other relevant additional environmental conditions are known for the proposed project site.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In 2012, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (District) purchased a conservation easement and trail easement over property owned by Alfred and Joseph Bordessa (Bordessa Ranch).

Pursuant to the Trail Easement, and consistent with the Conservation Easement the District is proposing designation of trail corridors and associated staging (parking) areas. Under the terms of the Trail Easement, the District must designate and survey the precise locations of two 50-foot-wide pedestrian/hiker-only trail corridors cumulatively not to exceed 5 miles in length, and two staging areas, not to exceed 1.5 acres in total combined area. Upon designating and surveying the trail corridors and associated staging areas, the District anticipates conveying the Trail Easement to the County, which would then be responsible for developing recreational amenities as provided in the Trail Easement and subject to the Conservation Easement retained by the District. The proposed project would establish 5-foot-wide maximum pedestrian/hiker-only trails with in the two approved 50-foot-wide designated trail corridors and the associated staging areas (trailheads/parking lots). The project would provide low-intensity public access to pursue outdoor, recreational, and educational uses. As outlined in the Trail Easement, future uses may include hiking, nature study, bird watching, sightseeing, picnicking, outdoor education, docent led tours, scientific research and observation, and other similar uses. Allowable uses may also include limited, seasonal walk-in access to the Estero for pedestrians and hand-carried, non-motorized boats, such as kayaks and canoes.

The existing agricultural facilities within the boundaries of the proposed project would not be modified, removed, or altered in any way with the exception of fencing. Agricultural fencing would need to be moved or gates installed in some locations for project implementation.

Project History

The table below summarizes key project milestones and events.

Date	Project Event/Milestone
10/20/2016	CEQA Initial Study and Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration circulated for the proposed Project.
08/22/2017	Due to the comments received on the Draft IS and MND the BOS approved a contract with Dudek (the Consultant) to prepare an EIR for the Estero Trail Project (the Project).
11/20/2017	CEQA (NOP if applicable, noticing, consultation, close of comment period)
12/13/2017	Scoping Meeting
12/20/2017	NOP 30-day public review period ended
12// 2019	Notice of Completion of DEIR



Prior Review

There have been no prior actions undertaken for the Project.

General Plan and Area Plans

The following General Plan and Area Plan policies are applicable to the project: The project site is located within the coastal zone and designated in the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 and zoning code for Land Extensive Agriculture (Sonoma County 2013). Portions of the site are within the Riparian Corridor (RC) and Scenic Resource (SR) combining districts.

The proposed project is within the Sonoma County Local Coastal Plan (LCP) area. The County’s LCP, certified in 1982 and last amended in 2001, provides recommendations and policy statements intended to implement the State’s Coastal Act policies. The LCP policy recommendations address development of appropriate recreation and access facilities in the coastal zone areas. Among the facilities needed for access ways and shoreline destinations are: safe trails, restrooms, parking areas, trash receptacles and signs (Sonoma County 2001, p. 59).

The project includes a limited trail system comprised of two pedestrian/hiker-only trails that would not exceed 5 miles in total length, a portable restroom facility at the trailhead, two staging/parking areas to accommodate up to 30 vehicles, trash receptacles, and informational and educational signage consistent with the LCP. The project is consistent with the guidance provided in the LCP for recreational facilities within the coastal zone.

Zoning

The project site is designated in the Sonoma County General Plan 2020 and zoning code for Land Extensive Agriculture Coastal District (Sonoma County 2013). Portions of the site are within the Riparian Corridor (RC) and Scenic Resource (SR) combining districts, as shown in Figure 2-2. The zoning allows for a density of one residence per 160 acres with a minimum lot size of 640 acres. The site is designated as a critical habitat area within the Coastal Zone, therefore the site includes a Biotic Habitat (BH) overlay which requires a biological assessment be prepared if any development is proposed. A Biological Resources Assessment was prepared for the proposed project by Dudek in November 2017 and was used in the preparation of the DEIR. .

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR)

Environmental Analysis

The Draft EIR is subject to a minimum 45-day public review period by responsible agencies and interested parties. In accordance with Section 15087 of the CEQA Guidelines, the County published a notice of availability of the Draft EIR and concurrently sent a notice of completion to the California Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to start the 45-day public review period. Agencies and the public may comment on the adequacy of the Draft EIR and the lead agency’s compliance with CEQA either in writing submitted to the County, as Lead Agency, prior to the end of the public review period, or through oral testimony at a public hearing on the Draft EIR.



On November 20, 2017, the County sent a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to governmental agencies, environmental groups, organizations, and other individuals and groups interested in the project. The NOP requested those agencies with regulatory authority over any aspect of the project, describe that authority and identify the relevant environmental issues that should be addressed in the EIR. The 30-day public review period ended on December 20, 2017.

This public hearing is an opportunity to receive additional public comment and direct staff to respond to all comments in writing in a Final EIR that will be considered by the Planning Commission at a later date.

Table 2. Summary of Level of Significance

Topic	Less than Significant	Less than Significant with Mitigation	Significant Unavoidable after Mitigation
Aesthetics	X		
Air Quality	X		
Agricultural and Forestry Resources	X		
Biological Resources		X	
Cultural Resources		X	
Geology and Soils	X		
Greenhouse Gas	X		
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	X		
Noise	X		
Mineral Resources	X		
Populations and Housing	X		
Public Services/Recreation	X		
Public Utilities	X		
Transportation			X

Significant Unavoidable Impacts

3.13-7: Under Cumulative plus Project conditions the addition of project traffic could cause an intersection or driveway access to meet or exceed criteria for provision of a right or left turn lane on an intersection or driveway approach. This is considered a significant and unavoidable impact.



Under Future plus Project conditions the need for a right-turn lane or taper was evaluated for SR 1 at the project access based on criteria contained in the NCHRP Report No. 279, Transportation Research Board (1985). It was determined a right turn lane or taper would not be warranted based on traffic volumes under Future plus Project conditions. The results are included on the same spreadsheets as the left-turn warrants, and are provided in Appendix E. Under Future plus Project conditions, the need for a left-turn lane on SR 1 to allow vehicles to turn left into the project site was also evaluated. Based on Caltrans criteria a left-turn lane is not warranted on SR 1 at the project access during both the weekday p.m. peak period and the weekend midday peak hour. However, under the Future plus Project midday peak hour scenario the left-turn lane warrant is just under the threshold of meeting warrants. Under this condition, 14 peak hour left-turns were estimated into the project site. If the left-turn volume was 17 peak hour vehicles, which is well within the standard deviation of the trip generation rates, the left-turn lane warrant would have been satisfied. Also, if the 95th percentile speed of 64 mph had been used, the warrant would have been also satisfied using the 14 peak hour left-turns (turn lane warrants are provided in Appendix E.) Because safety was a concern raised due to vehicles accessing the project site and because under Future plus Project conditions a left-turn lane is warranted due to project traffic, this is considered a potentially significant impact.

The County currently does not have an adopted plan or funding mechanism to widen SR 1 to include a left turn lane in this area as well as sufficient shoulder width to accommodate bike lane facilities that would be required by Caltrans. Therefore, because there is no funding available to construct this left-turn lane under Future plus Project conditions, the impact is considered significant and unavoidable.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

A public scoping meeting was held by the County on Wednesday, December 13, 2017. The purpose of this meeting was to provide the public and governmental agencies with information on the proposed project and the CEQA process and to give attendees an opportunity to identify environmental issues that should be considered in the EIR. Attendees were invited to mail or email their comment letters to the County during the 30-day NOP public review period by no later than 5:00 p.m. on December 20, 2017. A total of 10 letters and emails were received during the public review period. Comments received in response to the NOP were used to determine the scope of this Draft EIR.

The following issues were raised in the written responses to the NOP:

- Proximity of active agricultural uses and proposed recreational uses, including potential damage to the environment, infrastructure and livestock due to an increase in public access;
- Potential for public trespassing to occur on surrounding private property;
- Potential introduction of diseases and non-native species to agricultural lands;
- Concerns regarding air quality impacts from construction and maintenance activities, cumulative air quality impacts, and fugitive dust control;
- Adequacy of biological surveys and timing of botanical surveys;
- Potential impacts to wetlands, riparian habitat, streams, and/or loss of wetlands;



- Concerns over proposed trail alignment with regards to documented avian species of special concern, particularly ground nesting, burrowing, and foraging species;
- Potential impacts of trail construction and subsequent human encroachment on nesting and foraging and disturbance to species including Burrowing owl and American badger;
- Location of trail signage on riparian or wetland habitat;
- Native American consultation with tribes, groups, and individuals interested in the project area;
- Request for hydrological studies to study whether project level activities would affect riparian flow patterns upstream of bridges, trestles, culverts, or other structures;
- Concerns regarding the remote location and the extended response time for emergency services, particularly for fire and sheriff departments;
- Increase in vehicle and foot traffic including project related trip generation, distribution, turning movements, storage capacity within the project vicinity, as well as the existing driveway capacity and staging area in relation to State Route 1; and
- Request for Transportation Demand Management measures for the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preceding Review Authority Recommendation

There has been no prior review of this DEIR by a recommending body.

Staff Recommendation

Conduct a public hearing on the Estero Trail Draft Environmental Impact Report, receive testimony, and continue the meeting, directing staff to prepare a Final Environmental Impact Report.

ATTACHMENT

EXHIBIT A: Draft Environmental Impact Report, published December 11, 2019, (Hard Copy).

