

March 22nd, 2022



Protecting Marin Since 1934

Max Korten, Director and General Manager
Mischon Martin, Chief of Conservation Science & Projects
Jon Campo, Principal Natural Resource Planner
Tara McIntyre, Principal Landscape Architect
Marin County Parks and Open Space District
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 260
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: Bowman Canyon

Dear Mr. Korten, Mr. Martin, Mr. Campo and Ms. McIntyre,

Thank you for the excellent presentation to the Marin Conservation League on Bowman Canyon on March 10. Bowman Canyon Ranch has long been recognized as a key priority for acquisition in the County's Conservation Plan. Although areas of the ranch remain in private ownership, the 409-acre property that was purchased is amazing for its natural resource values, and its acquisition by the Open Space District is entirely consistent with Goal 1 in the 2008 Strategic Plan: Protect and Restore Our Lands! The rich habitat diversity such as wetlands, two types of oak woodlands, bay alliance, rare native grasslands, serpentine, and chaparral are worthy of protection and restoration.

It is notable that staff identified the serpentine area as not only the "Crown jewel of Bowman Canyon and the Open Space District" but also as "the most important (habitat) that we have on our lands currently." With rare species such as Marin dwarf flax, which is California and federally listed, Tiburon buckwheat, northern harrier, grasshopper sparrow and horned lark, it is clearly a rare site. This is accentuated by finding Franciscan onion, which had never been found in Marin County before.

Given this abundance of biological diversity, it is surprising that none of the 10 goals cited for planning purposes explicitly acknowledges protection of these resource values as a primary goal for their own sake. Instead, the goals reflect only the needs and challenges of recreational access, including the potential for seven miles of new trail. Granted that Goal 4 in the Strategic Plan – Connect Communities with the Land for Recreation and Health – is also important, MCL believes the rationale behind planning the new acquisition is significantly out of balance. We have several comments at this point in the planning:

1. Bowman Canyon deserves a separate identity from Mt. Burdell because of its unique character and natural values.
2. The County acquired this land for the sensitive natural resource values that it contains. Planning needs to focus more on fulfilling the premise of the guidance documents of the

175 N. Redwood Dr., Ste. 135, San Rafael, CA 94903 | 415.485.6257 |
mcl@marinconservationleague.org

Marin Conservation League was founded in 1934 to preserve, protect and enhance the natural assets of Marin County.

Strategic Plan and the more recent Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Plan, both of which emphasize the importance of preserving, enhancing and restoring natural environment. Instead, planning for the site appears to be based almost entirely on the Road and Trail Management Plan.

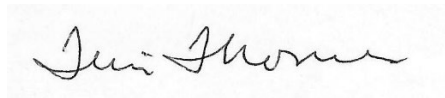
3. We believe seven miles of new trail crisscrossing this sensitive preserve is excessive and will fragment the natural habitats, even though preliminary trail concepts attempt to minimize intrusion into sensitive habitats. Research supporting this concern is found in the California Fish and Wildlife Journal document *Recreation Ecology in protected areas*, which identifies Trail-related disturbances, including fragmentation, edge effects, and expansion of the effect zone over time.

In conclusion, MCL is inspired by the assessment work that has been done but requests a broader educational and ecological approach to planning of this unique preserve. Among other things, MCL requests that the Goals for this site be restated to include the protection of sensitive resources for their scientific, educational and intrinsic values. Second, we request that education, interpretation, and protection barriers be included as essential tools in planning. Third, we request that the greatest sensitivity be exercised in planning for recreational access by using existing roads wherever possible and reducing miles of realignments that involve new trail cutting. Finally, we request that the District allocate specific ranger staff to ensure these valuable resources are protected and that visitors are educated.

Thank you for your attention!



Robert Miller
President



Terri Thomas
Chair, Parks and Open Space Committee