

June 9th, 2022



Protecting Marin Since 1934

Marin County Planning Commission
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903
Email: planningcommission@marincounty.org.

Re: Stream Conservation Ordinance for San Geronimo Valley

Dear Commissioners:

Marin Conservation League supports adoption of the Expanded Stream Conservation Ordinance for the San Geronimo Valley as recommended by staff, including provisions for a combining district, site plan review and assessments, proposed buffer requirements, and rezoning of Combining District lots. We especially appreciate recommendations for expanded stormwater standards and enhanced protections for ephemeral streams.

Heightened protection of ephemeral streams comports with emerging science. Given the tendency of these flashy channels to occasionally meander in storm events, setbacks are important not only for habitat protection, but in some instances for property protection. This is timely as the more intense atmospheric rivers that are anticipated can turn these sometime swales into raging downhill torrents.

We ask consideration of the following several issues.

Removal and Trimming of Vegetation (22.52.030.D 2). In site plan review exemptions, native trees with habitat value, such as California bay laurel and pyrophytic vegetation, should not be exempt from site plan review. Site assessment should document presence and assess value of all trees for habitat, climate moderation, and other environmental functions, and prioritize retention of valuable vegetation.

Determining trees and/or vegetation to be exempt from review should not rely on generic lists of “combustible plants” that include native plants unless there have been specific flammability studies on those plants in our area. A California Fish & Wildlife study of variables affecting fire intensity in the 2017 Sonoma fires, for example, suggests that riparian areas are negatively correlated with canopy damage in a wildfire. This factor is not directly addressed in Dev Code 22.62 but should be a consideration in site review/assessment of proposed tree removals including Bay Laurel, a riparian species common in Marin. The removal of native plants should be discouraged.

Ordinance Relation with SB9. Information provided to the public should clarify how SB9 would or could impact development plans in the San Geronimo Valley Combining District.

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.

CWP Diagrams in Staff Report. The diagrams showing measurement of buffers in the Inland Rural Corridor, and specifically along ephemeral streams, are inconsistent with text. This should be corrected. Outreach material to property owners must be crystal clear, in plain English, and accompanied by accurate and helpful visual presentations.

Ordinance Site Review/Assessments. Fair and accurate assessments will be crucial to maintaining public respect for, and trust in, provisions of this ordinance. We urge that the County ensure adequate resources to accomplish this.

Point of Sale Inspection. This is long overdue, and should be required, perhaps in tandem with disclosure of safety hazards such as fire and flood risks based on information from reliable sources.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Yours truly,



Robert Miller
President



Susan Stompe
Chair, Land Use, Transportation and Water Committee