



April 17, 2020

VIA EMAIL: EBRIGGS@CO.SANTA-BARBARA.CA.US

Errin Briggs, Supervising Planner
Santa Barbara County Planning and Development
123 E. Anapamu St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Ms. Briggs:

**ACQUISITION OF CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON WILLIAMSON ACT CONTRACTED LAND
STRAUSS WIND ENERGY PROJECT, SCOLARI RANCH, SANTA BARBARA COUNTY**

The Department of Conservation (Department) received notice of the intention of Santa Barbara County (County) to acquire property (083-080-004, 083-090-001, 083-090-002) within an agricultural preserve and subject to Williamson Act contracts. The County has approved the Strauss Wind Energy Project which includes 29 wind turbines and supporting infrastructure within the subject properties. Pursuant to the County's Uniform Rules (Rule 2-9C and 2-1), wind energy is a compatible use with agricultural preserves. The project's construction and operation would cause impacts to certain sensitive species. Measures were applied to the project to mitigate for these impacts. Acquisition of the easements will ensure that species located on the subject lands are protected in perpetuity while specifically allowing for ongoing agricultural uses consistent with the existing Williamson Act contracts.

California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Comments

The Department has forwarded the project to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) for review and comment. CDFA has 30 days to respond as required by Government Code (GC) §51291(b). Should CDFA elect to contribute to comments, the Department will incorporate those comments as required and notify the County at that time.

Department Comments

Upon review of the documents provided in the notification, the Department agrees that, because the County will acquire the easement within the preserve it administers and will restrict the land to agricultural or open space uses for at least 10 years, the County is exempt from making the findings required under GC § 51292 through the exemptions specified under GC § 51293 (b) and (j).

The Department agrees, that because the project is consistent with the terms of the Williamson Act contract, the County is not required to remove the contract from the property prior to constructing the project. However, given that the County, as a public agency, will not utilize the contract's property tax reduction, the Department

recommends that the County non-renew the Williamson Act contracts to avoid any potential conflicts of uses.

Conclusion

Please be advised that GC § 51291(c) requires the County to notify the Department once the property is acquired. Furthermore, if any significant changes are proposed for the project before it is completed, please consult GC § 51291(d) for further requirements.

Please be advised that CDFA has 30 days to provide their comments. This letter, therefore serves as a preliminary comment letter; the Department will send a new final letter to incorporate any comments received by CDFA (which can be at 30 + 1 days, but can be sooner).

Thank you for notifying the Department of the potential acquisition. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact Annie Giovacchini, Associate Environmental Planner at (916) 324-9038 or via email at Annie.Giovacchini@Conservation.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Monique Wilber

Monique Wilber
Conservation Program Support Supervisor