

Late
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de la Guerra, Sheila Public Comment

From: Molly Taylor <mtaylor@cecmail.org>
Sent: Thursday, June 15, 2023 10:41 AM
To: sbcob
Subject: Budget Hearing Comment Letter
Attachments: BOS Comment Letter_ Land Stewardship & Carbon Farming Specialist Position.pdf

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Hello,

Please see my attached comment letter for the Board of Supervisors budget hearing schedule for tomorrow.

Thank you,
Molly

Molly Taylor (she/her)
Climate Smart Agriculture Program Manager
[Community Environmental Council](#)
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Dear Honorable Supervisors,

The Community Environmental Council (CEC) sent a letter (see appendix) outlining our support, as well as the support of the agricultural community, for the proposed Land Stewardship & Carbon Farming Specialist position. Representatives from a diverse stakeholder group have expressed their support for this position and the need to tie tangible climate mitigation strategies to rural economic development solutions. In the County's draft Climate Action Plan, natural and working lands have an increased prominence, and statewide there is recognition of their ability to sequester carbon. The County has a unique opportunity here to show environmental leadership that could ripple out to other agricultural counties.

America increasingly faces the impacts of climate change. As we submit this letter, much of the Northeast is blanketed in unprecedented levels of wildfire smoke - an experience familiar to us on the Central Coast - and an example of the pressing need for natural and working lands to be a focal point of climate resilience planning moving forward.

As outlined in prior communications, we are confident that this position will be able to leverage the unprecedented federal and state investments in this space to ensure cost share for the position. Since the last letter was submitted, the county's Sustainability Division partnered with local Resource Conservation Districts, CEC and others to submit a grant application to the Department of Conservation's Climate Smart Land Management Program. If awarded, this grant would provide up to \$118,000 to fund this position request. This sort of collaboration and dedication on the part of regional sustainability partners only further emphasizes the need for this position and continued engagement on the county level.

With Appreciation,
Molly Taylor
Climate Smart Agriculture Program Manager
Community Environmental Council

Appendix

We are writing to alert you to significant state and federal dollars that are not being fully accessed in Santa Barbara County, and to propose a solution that would ensure local natural and working landscapes are fully engaged as a climate mitigation strategy.

As you know, natural and working landscapes are a treasured resource throughout Santa Barbara County, providing high quality agricultural products, economic development opportunities and beautiful landscapes. Santa Barbara produces \$1.9 billion in agricultural products annually, making it the twelfth most productive county in the state. These landscapes also provide numerous critical ecosystem services, including but not limited to carbon sequestration, groundwater recharge, and biodiversity. They could also play a key role in meeting the goals set forth in the county's Climate Action Plan (CAP) by *reversing* the effects of climate change and building resilience to its impacts.

Ecosystem services have been recognized in both the public and private sector and are now receiving unprecedented investment through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, California's Healthy Soils Program, and increased demand for voluntary offset credits. **However few of these dollars are coming into Santa Barbara County due to a lack of strategic coordination with land managers and County staff.** Recent federal and state funding includes:

- \$3.1 billion awarded in 2022 via the USDA's Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities program
- \$85 million allocated to CDFAs Healthy Soils Program for 2023
- \$180 million allocated to Central California (C2) Innovation Engine that will be distributed over the next decade to solve food-energy-water climate challenges

Natural and working lands will be a critical component in meeting the county's climate adaptation and climate action plan's (CAP) goals by 2030 and 2045. Numerous healthy soils, groundwater recharge, native habitat installation and conservation projects have been identified in Santa Barbara County, however, there exist numerous regulatory and financial barriers to implementation that must be solved in collaboration with county staff and agricultural and environmental stakeholders.

To successfully access funding streams and meet county CAP goals, we strongly urge the county to fund a dedicated staff position to ensure natural and working lands are fully engaged as a climate solution. This position could work with external stakeholders and internally within county departments in a non-regulatory capacity to leverage state and federal investments. **We are confident that this position could be sustained, in part, by grant funding, due to the recent climate investments and legislation.**

Our proposed position would liaise between the Sustainability Division, Long Range Planning Division, the Agricultural Commissioner, the Agricultural Advisory Committee, and the Land Stewardship and Carbon Farming Subcommittee of the Santa Barbara County Regional Climate

Collaborative, and other stakeholders, to reduce barriers and develop climate solutions on natural and working lands.

Recommended functions for this position:

- Identify and apply or support applications to external funding to support climate resilience projects on natural and working lands
- Develop policies, programs, projects and pilots to advance natural and working lands as a climate solution
- Liaise with internal and external stakeholders to address regulatory barriers and develop pathways to implement climate resilience projects, such as carbon sequestration and water conservation projects
- Develop a county budgeting framework for investing in local climate resilience projects on natural and working lands

The following signatories support this recommendation:

Molly Taylor,
Climate Smart Agriculture Program Manager,
Community Environmental Council

Executive Director, Santa Barbara Botanic
Garden

Mike Wondolowski
President, Carpinteria Valley Association

Doug Kern
Executive Director, Gaviota Coast
Conservancy

Bill Leahy
Santa Barbara Region Director, LegacyWorks
Group

Jesse Smith
Director of Land Stewardship, White Buffalo
Land Trust

Aaron Kreisberg
Staff Ecologist, Channel Islands Restoration

Ed Seaman
Executive Director, Wild Farmlands
Foundation

Russell Chamberlin
Co-owner and co-manager, Ted Chamberlin
Ranch

Director of Stewardship, Restoration Oaks
Ranch
Owner/Operator, Santa Barbara Blueberries

Mary Heyden
Co-owner and co-manager, Ted Chamberlin
Ranch

Meredith Hendricks
Executive Director, The Land Trust for Santa
Barbara County

Steve Windhager, Ph.D.



Santa Barbara Botanic Garden



WHITE BUFFALO LAND TRUST

Restoration Oaks Ranch



The Land Trust For Santa Barbara County

WILD FARM LANDS FOUNDATION



SANTA BARBARA BLUEBERRIES