

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

April 24, 2009

Chairman Joseph Centeno
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101

*By email to sbcob@co.santa-barbara.ca.us
and by hand delivery*

RE: Tajiguas Landfill Reconfiguration

Chairman Centeno and Members of the Board of Supervisors:

This office represents the Gaviota Coast Conservancy ("GCC") in this matter.

We believe the County's reliance on a highly speculative relocation program for the threatened red legged frog is misplaced. We urge the Board to modify the project to require the relocation effort be tested for at least one season to determine if relocation will be effective. In most cases, such programs have been failures, and we submitted several technical studies that discount the effectiveness of such programs.¹ Dodd and Seigel's comprehensive review of relocation and translocation (RRT) efforts "casts doubt on the effectiveness of RRT programs as a conservation strategy, at least for most species of amphibians and reptiles." Based on RRT efforts conducted before its publication, the study found "no RRT program has yet established a self-sustaining population of snakes, turtles, frogs, or salamanders." Rathbun and Schneider tracked the movement of translocated red legged frogs and found a considerable rate of return.

We note that the County has been unable to fulfill the objective of connecting a trail from Baron Ranch's coastal frontage to the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains as envisioned in County trails planning as early as the 1970's.² That objective was envisioned as a benefit of the County's purchase of the property in 1991. While a pilot program opening a section of hiking trails within the Baron Ranch is in development, that work has always been acknowledged to be an interim step toward the eventual extension to the crest of the mountains. In furtherance of that initial objective, County Parks completed a feasibility study in 2000, concluding that the Gaviota Crest

¹ K. Dodd and R. Seigel, *Relocation, Repatriation, and Relocation of Amphibians and Reptiles: Are They Conservation Strategies that Work?* Herpetologica, 47 (3) 1991, 336-350; G. Rathbun and J. Schneider, *Translocation of California red-legged frogs (Rana aurora draytonii)*, Wildlife Society Bulletin, 29 (4) Winter 2001, 1300-1303.

² See Crest Trail at Baron Ranch Feasibility Study, County Parks Dept. (July 2000), page 4, attached hereto as Exhibit 1.

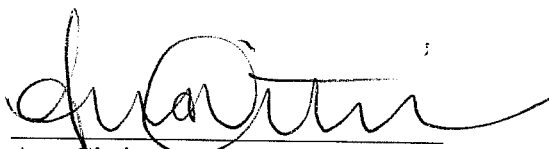
Trail "can be achieved." We strongly urge this Board to direct staff to prioritize the completion of the Gaviota Crest Trail as an essential component of the landfill expansion project. This would finally satisfy the public recreation justifications for purchasing Baron Ranch.

Finally, the County promised years ago that the Tajiguas landfill would ultimately be closed, and the Board's 2002 approval of an expansion in air space for the landfill only provided for 15 years of continued filling. The reconfiguration project appears to be another strategy for continuing "operations as usual" and prolonging operation of this poorly-planned and ill-sited operation. The conditions of approval should specify an end date for operation of the facility so that all jurisdictions will take necessary planning steps early enough to ensure the availability of a suitable replacement strategy to solid waste issues.

We urge the Board to direct staff to ensure that biological and recreational impacts are fully mitigated and that the County begin phasing out this facility.

Sincerely,

LAW OFFICE OF MARC CHYTILO



Ana Citrin

Exhibit 1: Gaviota Crest Trail at Baron Ranch Feasibility Study, County Parks Dept. (July 2000); selected pages.

**Gaviota Crest Trail
at Baron Ranch**

Feasibility Study



County of Santa Barbara

Prepared by:
County Parks

In coordination with:
**Public Works Solid Waste Division
Planning and Development**

July 2000

EXHIBIT 1

TRAILS PLANNING PROCESS

The Gaviota Crest Trail at Baron Ranch was envisioned as a benefit originally through the purchase of the Baron Ranch in 1991. County trails planning in the late 1970's identified, in the Recreational Element of the Comprehensive Plan, the potential for several trail connections from the coastal area along the Gaviota Coast to the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains. The planning anticipated that connections could be realized from the Coastal Trail, up coastal canyons to West Camino Cielo, an access road following the crest of the coastal range, providing opportunities for loop trails connecting the coast with the forest.

With the purchase of Baron Ranch, the opportunity presented itself for such a loop through the connection of properties under public agency control. Commencing at the State Park beach properties on the south side of Highway 101, a trail continuing through Baron Ranch on the north side of 101 and up the Arroyo Quemado watershed to the Los Padres National Forest and West Camino Cielo, could then continue westerly along the crest of the mountains to Gaviota State Park.

Initial meetings were held between County Parks and Planning and Development to discuss the potential concept for and environmental compatibility of a trail in this coastal canyon area. Meetings were also held with County Solid Waste Division, who has administration responsibility for the Baron Ranch and its agricultural operations. Concerns were identified for the on-going viability of agriculture in light of the proposed public access into the ranch. Solid Waste identified concerns surrounding fruit theft, vandalism, liability and the transference of root rot fungus, as well as maintenance and operational concerns as a prerequisite for planning an effective trails system.

Meetings were also held between the County and the US Forest Service as the trail location proposal would consider the connection, at the northwesterly boundary of the Baron Ranch, to the Forest Service lands north of the ranch. Representatives of the Forest Service indicated that trail use of West Camino Cielo, mostly a graded dirt road along the crest of the Santa Ynez mountain range, now occurs commencing at Gaviota State Park to the west. Less than a mile easterly of what would be a trail connection up from Baron Ranch, West Camino Cielo enters private property with no public access rights. The Forest Service indicated that it would be necessary to sign the boundary of the Forest Service property so the public would be aware of private property areas. The Forest Service indicated that due to their current fiscal situation, they are not adding any new trails to their system that would add operations and maintenance burdens. It is, therefore anticipated that some form of memorandum of understanding between the Forest Service and the County would need to be in place to address the issue of maintenance and operation responsibilities. Further, the Forest Service indicated that any new trail proposals must undergo federal environmental review as well as an archeological survey of the trail route.

Additionally, a meeting was held between the County, the California Conservation Corps (CCC) and the County Riding and Hiking Trails Advisory Committee (CRAHTAC) to