

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
for the
PROPOSED FAIRFAX TIMBERLAND CONVERSION PROJECT**

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Project Name: Fairfax Timberland Conversion Project
Project Location: Near Annapolis, Sonoma County, California
Lead Agency: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Lead Agency Contact: Mr. Allen Robertson, Deputy Chief
Environmental Protection
Send Comments to: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, Ca 94244-2460
Email: SacramentoPublicComment@fire.ca.gov
NOP Scoping Meeting: September 2, 2004 at Horicon Elementary,
35555 Annapolis Road, Annapolis, CA 95412
Comment Period Ends: September 20, 2004

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) is the lead agency for the preparation of a draft Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”) for the proposed Fairfax Timberland Conversion Project (proposed project). The scope of the EIR has been proposed based upon a determination by CDF that the project may have a significant effect on the environment. CDF has directed the preparation of this EIR in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Once a decision is made to prepare an EIR, the lead agency must prepare a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to inform all responsible and trustee agencies that an EIR will be prepared (CEQA Guidelines Section 15082). The purpose of the NOP is to provide agencies with sufficient information describing both the proposed project and the potential environmental effects to enable the agencies to make a meaningful response as to the scope and content of the information to be included in the EIR. CDF is also soliciting comments on the scope of the EIR from interested persons.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Location and Setting

The proposed project includes the issuance of a Timberland Conversion permit, which would exempt 169.5 acres of a 190.5-acre vineyard project from Forest Practice Act tree stocking (tree planting) requirements, in order to facilitate the development of a vineyard (see Figure 1). The total acreage of the involved properties is 299-acres, 190.5-acres of which are proposed for vineyard production. Of the 190.5-acres, 169.5 acres currently supports timber and would require the Timberland Conversion permit. The project area is located on a broad, flat ridge between Grasshopper Creek and the Wheatfield fork of the Gualala River, approximately 0.5 miles southeast of the town of Annapolis and accessible from Annapolis Road (a county road) via two private permanent gravel roads (see Figure 2). An old barn currently exists on the project site, as well as remnants of an old sawmill. Historically used for agriculture, the project site has remained fallow since approximately 1964.

The majority of the timberland conversion area drains into an unnamed Class II tributary to the Wheatfield Fork of the Gualala River. The northernmost portion of the project area drains into a minor Class III watercourse that drains into Grasshopper Creek, which then drains into Buckeye Creek. A number of Class III watercourses and two Class II watercourses exist adjacent to the conversion area, and two minor Class III watercourses exist in the northern portion of the project area. Watercourses do not exist within the conversion area; however, a Class IV pond exists within the property boundary.

Other Required Permits And Approvals

Other permits and approvals required to complete this project include:

- Timber Harvest Plan – approved by CDF
- Timberland Conversion Permit – issued by CDF
- Sonoma County – Grading Permit (ministerial)

Project Components

The proposed project includes the issuance of a Timberland Conversion permit, exempting the requirement to meet Forest Practice Rules stocking, in order to facilitate the development of a vineyard. The proposed project also includes a Timber Harvest Plan (THP). The affected area would remain zoned Resources and Rural Development.

The timber harvest would remove all trees within the “conversion area.” Tractor yarding (using tractors to haul trees) would be the method utilized within the conversion area. The existing seasonal roads would be used to access timber

within the project area, and would require minimal grading for maintenance purposes during timber hauling operations. One temporary road would be constructed for timber harvesting operations. The road would be removed following timber harvesting operations and would become part of the proposed vineyard.

Timber harvesting and conversion operations would not occur within the standard Class II and Class III watercourse protection zones that are adjacent to the timberland conversion area.

A reservoir, totaling 73 acre-feet, would be constructed to supply the new vineyard with water (although once the vines are established, the vineyard would be dry-farmed during some years). The newly planted vineyard units would be drip irrigated by reusing surface runoff retained within the reservoir. A well would be drilled on-site to provide water for vineyard workers and to be utilized for domestic water. The well would only provide potable water for drinking and washing hands during the work-day and would not be used for irrigation or for recharge of the proposed reservoir. Plans do not exist for future housing or winery facilities on the project site. In addition, the vineyard would be closed to the general public.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The EIR is proposed to focus on the following technical environmental issues:

Aesthetics

The Aesthetics analysis will summarize existing regional and project area aesthetics and visual setting and will also describe project specific aesthetics issues regarding development of the proposed project such as scenic vistas, trees, historic buildings, scenic highways, existing visual character or quality of the site and its surrounding areas, as well as light and glare. The analysis will also include the identification of the thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies.

Air Quality

The Air Quality analysis will include calculations of expected emissions generated from sources such as timber harvesting, log hauling, slash treatment, construction activities, including burn pile operations, and grading and trenching activities. The analysis will also include calculations of operational emissions from project initiation to buildout of the proposed project. After calculations are made, impacts associated with the project will be identified and mitigation will be recommended as needed. Cumulative impacts to air quality will be evaluated based on guidance provided by the Northern Sonoma Air Pollution Control District. The analysis will be based on the technical study being prepared by Donald Ballanti.

Biological Resources

Included within the biological resources analysis will be a discussion regarding the proposed project's potential effects to plant communities, wildlife, and wetlands including adverse effects on rare, endangered, candidate, sensitive, and special-status species. The analysis will also include a description of the existing setting, identification of the thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies. The appropriate agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the NOAA Fisheries (formerly the National Marine Fisheries Service), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be consulted. The analysis will be based on the technical report prepared for the project site.

Cultural Resources

This analysis will describe the potential construction-related effects to historical, archaeological, and paleontological resources. In addition, the analysis will also include identification of the thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies. The analysis will be based on the technical study prepared for the project site.

Geology and Soils

Included within the Geology and Soils analysis will be a description of the potential effects from earthquakes, landslides and liquefaction as well as identification of any unique geological features within the project site, including the proposed reservoir. In addition, the Geology and Soils sub-chapter will include an analysis of potential sedimentation and erosion impacts based upon the Erosion Control Plan prepared for the proposed project by Erickson Engineering, Inc. The analysis will include a description of the existing setting, identification of the thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies.

Hazards

The Hazards analysis will summarize the setting and describe the potential for existing or possible hazardous materials on-site, such as the presence of organochlorine pesticides, or impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed project. This analysis will include identification of the thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The Hydrology and Water Quality analysis will identify potential impacts on irrigation drainage, storm water drainage, flooding, groundwater, seepage, and water quality. Consideration will include on-site as well as off-site infrastructure facilities. The analysis will also include a description of the existing setting, identification of the thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies. The Hydrology

and Water Quality chapter will be based on a technical analysis completed by West Yost & Associates.

Land Use and Agricultural Resources

The Land Use analysis will evaluate the consistency of the proposed project with CDF and Sonoma County's adopted plans and policies. The analysis includes a review of the County's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, as well as any other appropriate documents, to address consistency issues. In addition, the Land Use analysis will assess the compatibility of the proposed project with the surrounding land uses, both existing and proposed.

The Agricultural Resources analysis will summarize the status of the existing agricultural resources of the site and the surrounding areas, using the current state model and data, including identification of any Prime/Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance on the project site. Any conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural use, Williamson Act, or right-to-farm ordinances applicable to the project site will also be identified. The analysis will include an evaluation of the loss of timberland, locally and regionally and, if necessary, will develop appropriate mitigation. In addition, the analysis will identify thresholds of significance applicable to the proposed project including the loss of prime farmland. The impacts will be measured against the thresholds of significance and appropriate mitigation measures and monitoring strategies will be identified which are consistent with the policies of CDF and Sonoma County.

Noise

The Noise analysis will include a discussion of the existing setting, identification of thresholds of significance, identification of impacts, and the development of mitigation measures and monitoring strategies. The noise analysis will be based on a technical noise report prepared by Bollard & Brennan. The analysis will identify relevant regulatory setting information, will identify changes in ambient noise characteristics, especially with respect to increased truck and worker traffic during harvest and the heavy farming machinery. The analysis will evaluate the effects on sensitive receptors and potential effect of existing noise source generators.

Transportation and Circulation

The Traffic and Circulation analysis will be based on the traffic study prepared by TJKM Transportation Consultants. The traffic study will describe existing traffic conditions, existing plus project traffic conditions, and cumulative traffic conditions. The report will also include standards of significance and methods of analysis, and will describe the impacts associated with the traffic and will propose mitigation to reduce the level of impacts. The traffic analysis will summarize the existing and planned regional and local transportation network as well as existing and future traffic conditions. In addition, the analysis will identify traffic loads and capacity of street systems including level of service standards for critical street segments and intersections. Potential traffic effects associated with increases in

volumes and changes in the nature of traffic and circulation patterns will be discussed as well as traffic hazards due to design features.

Cumulative Impacts

The Cumulative Impacts analysis will discuss and evaluate the cumulative development that would occur independent of, but during the same timeframe as, the proposed project, or in the reasonably foreseeable future. These projects must be within the project vicinity and of sufficient size to affect the anticipated future conditions of the project site. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) has provided a list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts. This list will be utilized to determine whether project-level impacts contribute cumulatively to environmental issues evaluated in the EIR. In addition, other permitted activities in the project vicinity will be considered in the assessment of cumulative effects. CEQA Guidelines Section 15130(a)(1) defines a cumulative impact as “[...] an impact which is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other projects causing related impacts.”

DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES

In accordance with Section 15126.6(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, several project alternatives, including the No Project Alternative, will be analyzed. The alternatives analysis would "describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives". The analysis would include sufficient information about each alternative to allow meaningful evaluation, analysis, and comparison with the proposed project. The significant effects of the alternatives are discussed, but in less detail than the significant effects of the proposed project. The discussion will identify and analyze the “environmentally superior alternative.”

SUBMITTING COMMENTS

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed project are addressed and all significant issues are identified, written comments are invited from all interested parties. Written comments concerning the proposed CEQA analysis for the Fairfax Timberland Conversion Project should be directed to the name and address below:

Mr. Allen Robertson
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460
(916) 657-0300
SacramentoPublicComment@fire.ca.gov

Written comments are due to CDF at the location addressed above by 4:00 p.m. on September 20, 2004.

SCOPING MEETING

A public scoping meeting will be held regarding the proposed EIR for the Fairfax Timberland Conversion Project on September 2, 2004 at 6 p.m. in the Multipurpose Room of the Horicon Elementary School at 35555 Annapolis Road, Annapolis, CA 95412.