



Planning and Development Department
Long Range Planning Division
Transmittal Memorandum

DATE: November 4, 2010

TO: GavPAC Members

FROM: David Lackie, Supervising Planner
Brian Tetley, Planner

CC: Supervisor Doreen Farr, 3rd Supervisorial District
Vicki Parker, Deputy Director, Long Range Planning

SUBJECT: GavPAC Meeting No. 22

The items listed below have been included as part of the meeting materials for GavPAC Meeting Nos. 22 & 23, to be held Wednesday November 10 & December 1, 2010, 6:30 p.m. in the Vista de Las Cruces School auditorium:

1. **Meeting Agenda:** Please see the attached joint agenda for the November 10, & December 1, 2010 GavPAC meetings (Attachment 1). For details, please see discussion of agenda items below.
2. **Draft Meeting Minutes:** Staff has provided draft meeting minutes from the October 27, 2010 GavPAC meeting for review and approval (Attachment 2).
3. **Coastal Commission LCP Update Guide Natural Resources Excerpt:** Staff has attached a copy of the Natural Resources excerpt from the Coastal Commission LCP Update Guide (Attachment 3) for your reference.
4. **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Adopted Permit Coordination Program Practices:** Staff has attached a copy of the 18 NRCS practices applicable to the adopted permit coordination program (Attachment 4) for your reference.
5. **Long Term GavPAC Meeting Schedule:** The revised GavPAC long term meeting schedule (Attachment 5) is attached for your review.
6. **Planning Issue Summary & Worksheets:** Staff has attached a copy of the planning issue summary chart and RSOS worksheets (Attachment 6) for your reference.

In addition to this packet, please bring the GavPAC documents binder with you to the meeting.

All GavPAC materials are also available for download from the following webpage:
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Resources Stewardship & Open Space Planning Deliberations (Agenda Item Nos. 5-7)

This meeting continues the deliberative phase of the land use planning process for the Gaviota Coast. The deliberative phase builds upon previous GavPAC work to identify core planning issues, and will provide an opportunity to discuss these issues in greater detail, and explore different planning options and approaches. Keep in mind that the goal in the deliberative stage is not to fully write or vet policy or ordinance language, but to develop consensus or at least refinement of GavPAC policy preferences which can be used by staff to craft draft policy statements and implementing tools. The review and revision to draft policy or ordinance language will occur later in the process after all of the deliberative meetings and a period of time for staff to develop the language.

The next two meetings will focus on natural resource and open space issues with an emphasis on the County's existing policy framework and the unique characteristics of the Gaviota Coast Plan Area. This discussion will hopefully result in a more refined list of planning issue priorities that are important to the committee and are within the reach of local land use policy.

Once priorities have been expressed, staff can help initiate the discussion on appropriate planning tools for consideration by the committee. These planning tools can run the gamut from ordinances, policy language refinements or clarifications, the application of planning overlays, new or existing, etc. In addition, staff's research into the approaches taken by other jurisdictions in addressing similar planning issues may be helpful. Once the GavPAC has formulated goal statements, Staff can utilize these to help develop the Plan.

In preparation for the upcoming meeting, please read and consider the following policy issues, which are meant to describe some of the key natural resource and open space policy considerations on the Gaviota Coast:

Existing Natural Resources Policy

Natural resources policy in Santa Barbara County resides mainly in the Comprehensive General Plan and Local Coastal Plan. The key policy standard for development in the County is preservation of natural features and native vegetation, to the maximum extent feasible, as exemplified by Land Use Element Hillside and Watershed Protection Policy No. 2: *"All developments shall be designed to fit the site topography, soils, geology, hydrology, and any other existing conditions and be oriented so that grading and other site preparation is kept to an absolute minimum. Natural features, landforms, and native vegetation, such as trees, shall be preserved to the maximum extent feasible. Areas of the site which are not suited to development because of known soil, geologic, flood, erosion or other hazards shall remain in open space."*

In addition, existing policy directs development to minimize its scale and resultant land alteration to achieve the project (Land Use Element Hillside and Watershed Protection Policy No. 1). Specific policy language also addresses specific protection for wetlands, coastal dune habitat, and stream and creek corridors (Land Use Element Streams and Creeks Policy No. 1, Local Coastal Plan Policy Nos. 9-2, 9-9, 9-14). The Conservation Element, while containing no actionable policy statements, provides important descriptions and supporting documentation about at-risk habitats within the County that supports policy consistency determinations with Land Use Element and Local Coastal Plan policies.

Planning Overlays

The overlay is a common planning tool to apply certain treatments to development proposals within a specific geographical area. Within the Gaviota Coast Plan Area, one existing overlay concerns natural resources: the Environmentally Sensitive Habitat (ESH) Overlay. On the Gaviota Coast, this overlay is applied to riparian corridors within the Coastal Zone. In the Goleta Valley Planning Area, the ESH Overlay also applies in Inland areas. The purpose of the ESH Overlay is to give additional protection to areas where there are especially-sensitive habitats. The additional protection is provided in the form of required minimum development buffer distances from the mapped ESH Overlay areas. And although ESH overlays have heretofore been applied only to riparian corridors, other sensitive habitat areas could theoretically be placed under an ESH Overlay.

Existing Policy Issues

Overall, the county has a set of strong basic policy statements about the importance of natural resources and the requirement to minimize impacts to natural resources to the maximum extent feasible. In the course of the processing of development projects this policy direction, coupled with the Environmental Review process and the application of the Environmental Thresholds & Guidelines Manual result in a robust case-by-case review process that ensures compliance with the policy standards.

However, the existing policy language is very broad, and generally does not distinguish or prioritize among any specific category of natural resources. Although the Conservation Element discusses ecological communities of greatest interest countywide, there is no direct policy implementation that prioritizes responses for the protection of especially sensitive habitat. Beginning with the previously identified Resource Stewardship & Open Space planning issues, the GavPAC may consider the identification of priorities.

Watershed Approach

The Gaviota Coast has unique habitat value due to its transverse orientation, homogenous geology, high topographical relief, and many parallel watersheds that drain to the ocean. The watershed (or subwatershed) is the smallest basic unit that defines the habitat milieu of an area, starting from the geology, hydrology, soil, and ultimately flora and fauna. As in many aspects of Land Use Planning, a case by case review of a site-specific setting drives policy responses to specific development proposals. In many settings, this approach has merit. However, more recent thinking about land use planning and resource protection indicates that the standard approach may perpetuate a certain myopia that focuses on a particular parcel with little regard for the overall regional setting. Under the standard land use planning approach, this larger watershed view is absent or loosely referenced when analyzing individual project applications. However, without knowing the carrying capacity of the watershed to absorb development impacts, a critical mass of cumulative development may harm the function of the overall watershed even though the impacts from each individual development is innocuous.

If the overall health of local watersheds is known, with water quality being the basic measure, planning using a watershed approach can have regional benefits and avoid some of the problems associated with the property-by-property approach over the long term. In addition, the watershed approach can take into account other land use patterns and management approaches to those uses including agriculture, recreation and rural residential uses.

Santa Barbara County Permit Coordination Program

The purpose of the Santa Barbara County Permit Coordination Program (Project) is to provide an efficient permitting process for accomplishing needed restoration work on private land. Currently, the Permit Coordination Program is only applicable to inland areas. The restoration projects are designed to improve critical water quality problems and enhance fish and wildlife habitat, including steelhead habitat connectivity, native riparian habitat, and habitat for California red-legged frogs, California tiger salamanders, and other aquatic species.

The proposed Project for Santa Barbara County consists of 1) 18 NRCS Conservation Practices (Practices), 2) NRCS standardized planning tools, and 3) a suite of Environmental Protection Measures, all of which are integrated to establish the core Project Description (described in detail, below). After extensive collaboration with NRCS and the Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD), regulatory agencies will condition and authorize in advance the Practices and issue multiple programmatic approvals to the CRCD as project sponsor and/or to the NRCS for projects involving federal funding.

Each individual project will have an applicant who will be the landowner, the authorized agent for the landowner, or the authorized agent for an organization. When landowners seek assistance, NRCS and CRCD will work with them directly to develop a conservation plan that best addresses the resource concerns

on that individual's land. If individual projects meet all of the criteria established for the Project (e.g., type of Practice, size limits, Protection Measures), the landowner or organization would be able to implement the work under the Project's guidelines without the need to seek individual permits. NRCS and CRCD retain discretionary authority over which projects are implemented under the Project, assist with individual project planning and design, oversee monitoring for compliance with permit conditions and design standards, and report results for each project to the permitting agencies.

Provide Incentives for Restoration on Private Land. While a growing number of farmers and ranchers in Santa Barbara County are interested in implementing small, environmentally beneficial projects on their lands, the time and complexity involved in obtaining multiple permits for each project often discourages them from moving forward with needed work. From the landowner's perspective, current agency review processes intended to protect natural resources often act as disincentives to voluntary practices that would reduce non-point source pollution and enhance habitat. Consequently, most farmers and landowners will continue with current land use practices if the challenges of obtaining governmental approvals exceed the perceived benefits. Thus, projects often are not attempted and landscapes continue to degrade or work may be performed with little or no regulatory oversight. The proposed Project addresses this problem by providing incentives for landowners to implement environmentally beneficial conservation practices and is expected to result in improved conditions to currently degraded areas.

Improve Degraded Water Quality. Excessive erosion and sediment is a major concern because it affects the viability of the ecosystem, stream hydraulics, wetlands, road systems, and the utility and economic viability of farm and ranch lands.

Enhance Habitat for Fish and Wildlife. Fish and wildlife will benefit in a number of ways from installation of conservation practices under the Project. Conservation practices that improve water quality also enhance habitat for fish and wildlife, especially through the reduction of sediment, nutrients, and pesticides to waterways. Most of the conservation practices target excessive erosion and sediment inputs to streams. Some of the conservation practices will restore native riparian vegetation through implementation of grazing management plans, removal of exotic, invasive vegetation, or planting native vegetation at degraded sites. Other practices will create new habitat for targeted species. For example, 1) removing barriers to steelhead migration will restore access to spawning areas that may have been blocked for decades and which have greatly contributed to the threat of steelhead extinction in southern California; and 2) creating new ponds on rangeland and restoring existing ponds may expand breeding habitat for the endangered California tiger salamander and the threatened California red-legged frog, and other aquatic species.

A complete list of the 18 NRCS Conservation Practices is provided in Attachment 4.

Updating Local Coastal Programs

The California Coastal Act of 1976 mandated protection of coastal resources and maximization of public access to the shoreline. Local governments could then prepare and implement Local Coastal Programs (LCPs), which once certified by the California Coastal Commission (CCC), gave the responsibility of issuing coastal permits for most new development to local governments. A LCP means a local government's (a) land use plans, (b) zoning ordinances, (c) zoning district maps, and (d) within sensitive coastal resource areas, other implementing actions, which, when taken together, meet the requirements of, and implement the provisions and policies of the California Coastal Act.

In support of LCP updates, the CCC provided a guidance document (April 2007) for meeting Coastal Act policies. Although it does not cover every issue that should be considered in an update, it highlights recent Coastal Commission decisions and policy concerns that most coastal communities need to address. Guidance on protecting sensitive habitats and other natural resources is included in Attachment 3.

Efforts to update resource policies have either been recently completed or are currently underway in the City of Malibu, San Luis Obispo County and the City of Newport Beach. These documents can also be referred to as examples of how to address climate change in an LCP update. Staff will be providing a summary on

LCP updates with respect to climate change in future materials for Resource Stewardship and Open Space deliberations.

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