

GAVPAC
OUTLINE OF DISCUSSION
ON
RESOURCES

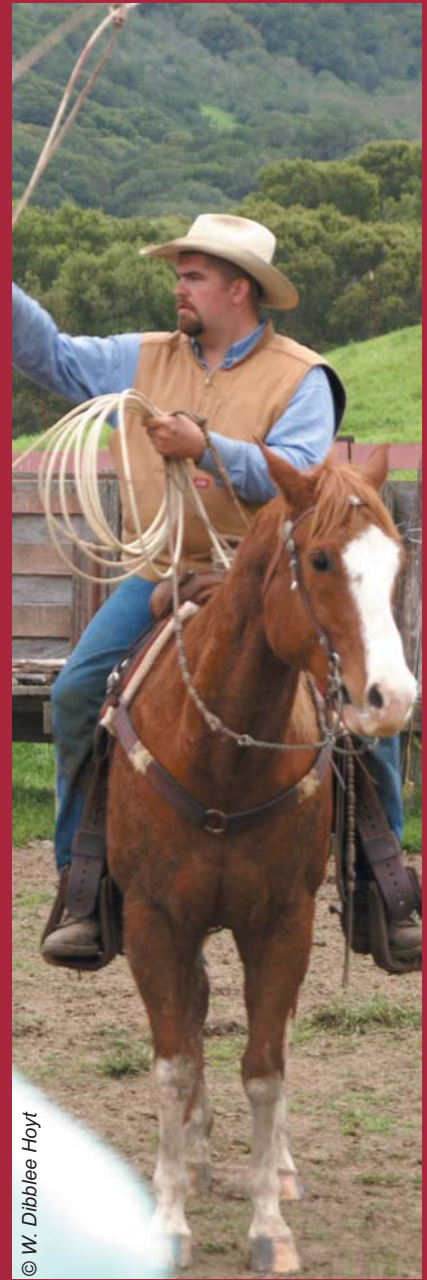
In order to focus and structure our discussion on Resources, I request that you re-read the Gaviota Study Group Report section on Stewarding the Land and Resources (attached) and consider the following as ideas and subject areas for us to direct staff in developing policies on this subject:

1. **Watershed Planning:** Develop a watershed planning policy utilizing the principles enunciated in the Study Group Report. Key elements include:
 - Watershed planning is voluntary.
 - Incentives should be provided which reward landowners for doing a watershed plan, ie it should act as a master plan or development agreement which allows ministerial approval of improvements within designated areas on the plan.
 - Landowners involved in watershed planning should be provided government technical assistance at no cost, and there should be no fees charged by the government for processing them.
2. **Control of Invasive Plants:** The County, the Cachuma RCD and the USDA NRCS should provide assistance to landowners to remove and control invasive species. In the case of an emergency, such as the citing of a new and highly contagious species, the County should have the right to enter private property, after notice, and remove the species.
3. **Restoration:** Implement the permit streamlining system in place in other coastal Counties for NRCS single stop permitting of defined restoration projects. Develop and implement strong policies protecting landowners from adverse effects of restoration. Consider a list of priority restoration projects to recommend for a pilot project to demonstrate how the new policies could work to protect property owners.
4. **Wildlife corridors:** Consider adoption of a policy which protects riparian corridors and other major and mapped wildlife corridors consistent with the right of property owners to develop their property.
5. **Interagency Council:** Develop a policy to establish an interagency council on the model of the Monterey County council which will consist of all public agencies with jurisdiction or property in Gaviota and which will review and comment on any significant agency project planned for the Gaviota area in light of County policies which protect the natural resources.
6. **ESHA:** How is ESHA determined? Does the current County mapping continue and how is it updated? Can we exclude from official ESHA areas restored by landowners? How can we deal with the CCC definition which seems to embrace

practically all the land in Gaviota? Why must grasslands with at least 10% native grass be considered ESHA? What is the setback from ESHA? How do we deal with ESHA in trying to facilitate agriculture?

**Gaviota Coast Study Group
Report & Recommendations
September 2005**

Respecting Our Heritage Determining Our Future



Stewarding the Land and Resources

The cultural heritage of the coast began more than 13,000 years ago with the ancestors of the current Chumash community, who established significant historical settlements throughout the region and who were the first stewards of the land. The historically recent European settlers displaced the Chumash, establishing cultural and land use patterns that persist to this day. Many of the current stewards of the land are descendants of those settlers, who also love the land and resources of Gaviota. All of these cultures contributed to the rural landscape that we enjoy today.

When we take this bird's eye view, we see the Gaviota Coast as more than lines on a map. It is an interconnection of plants, people and wildlife — a region rich with history. It is also the largest relatively undeveloped remnant of the Southern California Mediterranean environment, with coastal ecosystems that are of both local and global importance. This place deserves a renewed commitment to sustainable land use and environmental management practices.



Key Recommendation

Protecting the cultural, agricultural and natural heritage of the Gaviota Coast requires taking an integrated and comprehensive approach. We can encourage ecological health, for example, by maintaining and connecting large habitat areas. We can improve water quality by planning at the “watershed level.” For this to be successful, we must build stronger, more respectful relationships among all users of the coast, including rural landowners, recreational users, the Chumash and the urban community. We must also provide regulatory relief and other incentives to those landowners and agriculturists who lead the way in protecting and restoring natural resources.

Policy Recommendations

Cultural resources of Gaviota

1. *A neutral, non-governmental organization should be identified to enhance community awareness of the Chumash and the ranching and farming cultures of Gaviota.*
 - a. This group might facilitate the establishment of a cultural center for gatherings, a museum to house artifacts that are currently kept elsewhere, and a community building and healing center for residents of the region.
 - b. This group might also coordinate voluntary access to cultural sites, sacred sites, and places to gather plants for ceremonial purposes.



Working at a watershed level

2. *By viewing the Gaviota Coast as a series of interconnected living watersheds, our region can address and plan for long-term ecological and economic needs, such as improving water resource management.*
 - a. Landowners should integrate the protection of watersheds into the economic uses of their land through voluntary, landowner-led, watershed-based

partnerships. In exchange for their efforts, they should receive regulatory relief, technical assistance, and streamlined certification and permitting. (See the sidebar on the next page for further discussion.)

3. *Scientifically-based watershed plans should be developed that contain clear, measurable goals.*



- a. Watershed plans should include comprehensive biological inventories, which are critical to developing broader ecosystem-based assessments.
 - b. A scientific advisory panel should be created to assist in watershed planning efforts. This panel should include members from public agencies, university scientists, conservation experts, landowners, and land managers who hold practical local knowledge and scientific expertise of ecosystems and watersheds.
 - c. The plans should include clear, measurable commitments from landowners. They should employ agricultural and land management practices that improve coastal watersheds and the general health and ecological integrity of the land and nearshore marine environment.
 - d. The plans should include clear performance measures to monitor the progress toward achieving the protection of watershed health and other goals, such as sustainable agricultural use.
4. *Watershed planning should be done in a spirit of open exchange of information and collaboration, to help restore a level of trust between landowners, conservationists and government agencies that is sorely lacking. Information collected in the watershed planning process is not to be used to preclude landowners from the legal and customary use of their land.*
- a. An information exchange — such as a watershed information network — should be created to provide access to credible, informed sources for watershed planning and management. Information should come from public and private sources, including independent scientific advisors and regional land managers with practical experience and local knowledge.
 - b. Pilot projects in a few important coastal watersheds can provide the community with models for collaboration, while also avoiding the cost and bureaucratic burden of trying to create many plans at the same time.

How watershed-scale planning could work

Watershed planning efforts on the Gaviota Coast could include these elements:

- **Pilot projects.** While it is desirable that watershed-based planning be undertaken across the entire Gaviota Coast region over time, pilot projects can be developed more quickly than trying to plan for the entire region, and successes at implementing the plans can be models for other watersheds to follow.
- **Streamlined certification.** County, state, and federal regulatory agencies should collaborate to develop criteria for a streamlined method to certify these watershed plans. Criteria need to address large-scale ecosystem issues, as well as site specific matters, means of tracking performance of planning activities, streamlining regulatory review, and monitoring the implementation of watershed plans.
- **Regulatory relief.** Landowners who participate in developing watershed plans and implement conservation and enhancement practices should be given meaningful relief from government regulatory and permit processes. Exemptions or blanket permits for appropriate management practices and restoration activities are needed to make it less threatening and costly for landowners to provide environmental benefits as part of their operations.
- **Government support.** Farmers and ranchers should be encouraged to utilize the services of existing entities. These include the Cachuma Resource Conservation District and the USDA National Resource Conservation Service, which can attract and manage grants and provide technical and financial support for watershed planning, conservation measures, and enhancement projects.
- **Public support.** Watershed planning, conservation and restoration efforts on private lands should receive direct financial support from the public. Private landowners should not be expected to shoulder all the burden of protecting and enhancing watershed health to provide a public benefit.
- **Long term commitment.** Watershed-based planning is not a short-term remedy to resource protection. It requires partnerships that are committed to long-term protection of watershed ecosystems and associated biodiversity. Funding and other resources will be required to strengthen watershed-based planning and policy development that can protect, and where needed, restore the health and integrity of the Gaviota's diverse watersheds.

What a 'watershed information network' should do:

- ▶ Provide a neutral forum for discussion and partnership in collaborative watershed-based planning and general ecosystem-based protection;
- ▶ Aid in gathering and synthesis of important economic and ecological information;
- ▶ Strengthen the baseline information on the ecology and economics of the coast;
- ▶ Improve the ecological and cultural understanding of the watersheds of the Gaviota coast, especially those that include habitat for wild southern steelhead recovery projects; and
- ▶ Establish a Scientific Advisory Panel that is made up of both social and physical scientists with regional expertise (the Scientific Advisory Panel will assist the Gaviota watershed plan development and implementation effort).

Real-life examples of local watershed planning:

Two local examples exist. The first is the San Antonio Creek Coordinated Resource Management Plan — prepared by the Cachuma Resource Conservation District (RCD) in December 2003. The second is the Southern San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties Agricultural Watershed Coalition — a joint initiative by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and several local agricultural organizations, including the County Farm Bureau. The purpose of the program is to assist owners and operators of cultivated agricultural land to comply with federal clean water requirements for their agricultural runoff water, through training and assistance to develop farm water quality plans and implement best management practices. Contact info for the program may be obtained at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/AGWaivers/Index.htm>.

Conserving and protecting natural resources

5. *Control, and where possible, eliminate invasive plants and replace with natives.*
 - a. Efforts should be funded to monitor and control the priority invasive plant species that threaten the diversity and sustainability of native floral and faunal communities.
6. *Restore and renovate degraded habitats in a manner consistent with continued agricultural use of the land. In particular, improve water quality and watershed health where it has been degraded by human activity.*
 - a. Local, state and federal agencies should work together to streamline the permitting process and provide permit exemptions to make it easier for landowners to undertake restoration activities.

We are All Connected

By Mike McGinnis

Early one evening I was driving to my home in the Santa Ynez Mountains, into the range that sets the stage for the region. I saw a large bobcat lying in the middle of the street, and pulled over to the side of the road. The bobcat was still panting and breathing. I cautiously petted his thick fur coat. His ears, teeth, paws and eyes were large for hunting small prey. I thought of the bobcat looming in the shadows of the brush, waiting for the appropriate time to cross the road.



The young bobcat died. I took the bobcat into the hills of its origin to bury it under an old oak tree, near coyote brush, monkey flower, and coastal sage. The bobcat is now part of the soil and oak tree.

The soil, bobcat and oak tree are linked. They are part of the breath of this landscape. The bobcat reminds us that we are not far removed from the wildness of this region, place, and community. Santa Barbara is still close to the earth. The soil is made up of the flesh and bones of every creature that shares this place with us.

The presence of animals, plants and soils are the gifts of this coastal bioregion. It is up to us who are alive now to translate this information into something more than memory.

- b. Public agencies and private landowners should remove culverts, debris dams and other obstacles to improve access for steelhead and to enhance aquatic biodiversity. These projects should be a priority for grant funding.
7. *Identify wildlife corridors between mountain habitats and the sea. Such corridors require significant ecological buffer areas to support the linkage between habitat areas. They should not preclude landowners from the legal and customary use of their land.*
 - a. Appropriate buffer areas should be integrated into the biological thresholds of the County. The scale of protection should focus on the relationships between the Santa Ynez range, foothills, valleys, riparian areas, coastal processes (such as wetlands), and the nearshore marine area.
 - b. Proposed future agricultural expansion or residential development should be reviewed in terms of new biological thresholds that support watershed-based planning.

- 8 *Santa Barbara County should promote use of the open space preserve program under the Williamson Act on private land with high natural resource value.*
- 9 *Due to the dynamic ecological conditions and scientific uncertainties associated with the coast, we do not support the use of Habitat Conservation Plans because they often fail to adequately protect habitats and species.*

General Plan and Local Coastal Plan update

10. *The County Board of Supervisors should initiate an update to the General Plan (GP) and Local Coastal Plan (LCP) for the Gaviota Coast, with a focus on the protection of the ecological relationships and linkages that exist between the coastal and marine ecosystems of the area. The updates should:*



- a. Embrace the development of policies and standards that rely, in part, on the work and results produced by voluntary watershed-based partnerships. If no voluntary pilot projects arise, the County should develop stronger policies to promote or require improved watershed management practices as part of the GP and LCP updates.
- b. Be consistent with federal and state initiatives that support ecosystem-based planning and watershed protection.
- c. Use the best available scientific information for the coastal and marine ecosystems of the area.

11. *The public process for updating these planning documents and associated management elements should be collaborative, involving landowners and stakeholders.*

12. *The current “biological thresholds” that have been established by the County that relate to riparian, native grassland, oak savannah, coastal sage scrub and other protected habitat areas should be revised to focus on ecosystem-based protection measures.*

- a. The protection of important integrated ecological core areas should be better recognized in the County LCP and GP policies for Gaviota. During the amendment process, scientific information and biological inventories of significant ecological core areas should be identified and used. These important ecological core areas, such as riparian areas, native grasslands, and oak forests, should be protected while respecting the rights of the landowner.

The ecological importance of the Gaviota Coast

The Gaviota Coast has been through many changes — Chumash village, rancho, lemon and avocado orchard, oil development, urban and suburban development, and tourist destination. But always it has remained a rich region of wilderness and an essential ecological core to the coastal ecosystems of southern California. Some of its more significant aspects are:

- The Gaviota Coast is considered one of the **top 15 hot spots for biodiversity** in the world. More than 1,400 plant and animal species depend on the Gaviota, including 60 species of fish and 195 species of birds. However, that biodiversity is threatened. The area contains 24 federally- or state-listed threatened or endangered plant and animal species and another 60 species of rare and special concern (including proposed endangered, threatened, candidate, and sensitive).¹
- It is the only place in the nation that features an **ecological transition zone** between northern and southern Mediterranean plant communities. Many northern plant species reach their southern geographic limits north of the Santa Ynez Mountains, and many southern species reach their geographic limits south of the mountains.²
- Gaviota also borders a biologically diverse **marine transition zone** attributed to the confluence of two major oceanic currents and the shape of the continental shelf at Point Conception. Its marine and terrestrial ecosystems work together in a large-scale system of relationships where biophysical processes of land, water and wind form unique species and habitats of the Southern California Bight.³
- It is uniquely **connected to the northern Channel Islands**. This region's animals and plants depend on ecological relationships among mountains (the Santa Ynez, San Rafael and Sierra Madre Ranges), the Santa Ynez River, urban and rural areas, vernal pools and coastal wetlands, and the marine environment — including the Santa Barbara Channel and the Channel Islands.⁴
- Gaviota **contains 34 watersheds**, each a symbol of the link between the activities of human beings and the general health of the coast and marine environment.⁵

1 *Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study*, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, March 5, 2004

2 Wayne Ferren and Kathy Rindlaub, Museum of Systematics and Ecology, Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology, University of California, Santa Barbara

3 Michael McGinnis, *A Recommended Study Area for the CINMS Management Planning Process: Ecological Linkages in the Marine Ecology from Point Sal to Point Magu, including the Marine Sanctuary*. US Department of Commerce NOAA. <http://www.cinms.nos.noaa.gov/manplan/pdf/McGinnis.pdf>

4 Michael McGinnis, op cit., <http://www.cinms.nos.noaa.gov/manplan/pdf/McGinnis.pdf>

5 *Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study*