



The Orange County Interfaith Coalition for the Environment

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September 29, 2009

Orange County Board of Supervisors
Pat Bates, Chairwoman
10 Civic Center Plaza
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: Request for Adequate Time to Review Open Space Lands Transaction and Letter of Intent

Dear Chairwoman Bates:

We are writing out of our deep concern for the process that has suddenly unfolded regarding the potential transfer of 20,000 acres of biologically significant natural lands from The Irvine Company to OC Parks. We believe the interest of the public, the County and the land is best served only if the process is open, transparent and inclusive. If the County is to receive this land in a deed transfer, 11,550 acres of which were not anticipated, we strongly feel the County should be in the best negotiating position possible. Ultimately, we believe the Letter of Intent should be stronger and does not go into enough detail. Prior to the Board's approval to proceed with negotiations, significant concerns must be addressed. More information and more time is needed to ensure a well informed decision by the Board.

Upon hearing of this agenda item only recently, we organized a Steering Committee of a dozen leading conservation organizations to obtain the facts, understand the transaction details, and determine our collective position. Many signatories to this letter represent groups that helped protect much of these lands through collaborative involvement in the country's first Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP). Within our Committee, there are more than 300 years of collective experience and expertise in conservation and land protection in Orange County and beyond. Most of us have first-hand knowledge of the challenges of conservation stewardship and resource management of natural lands.

Despite our long and vigorous history as stakeholders, we have only learned of this potential change to the status of the Irvine Ranch lands within the last two weeks, yet talks have been underway for over a year. Nevertheless, we understand the County's interest and have taken immediate steps to evaluate the proposal and to share our knowledge with each other and with OC Parks Director Mark Denny. We appreciate the fact that Director Denny was willing to rearrange his schedule on one day's notice and meet with our Steering Committee on Thursday, September 17th. We welcomed the candid discussions.

Some concerns were alleviated, while others were amplified. Some of our more serious concerns include: the proposed transition from conservation easements requiring third-party monitoring to deed restrictions, thereby removing the oversight advantage; the currently unanalyzed permanent fiscal impacts to the OC Parks budget and the question as to whether there is the financial wherewithal for assuming long-term stewardship responsibilities; the permanent

outsourcing of land management responsibilities; the lack of a non-wasting endowment; and the lack of a plan from the County to protect existing *mitigation* lands from conflicting uses. We therefore respectfully request that this item be removed from the September 29, 2009 Board agenda so that we, along with the public, can more fully examine the proposal, including its effects on the land's conservation values and implications for the Orange County taxpayer. The Board and the public would benefit from having more details and accurate information about this proposed land transfer, including a line-item budget and maps that accurately document lands in the proposed transfer and their relationship to the NCCP, among other things.

We feel strongly that the conservation community needs to be fully engaged in the process. We look forward to being a part of this process and we firmly believe our participation will strengthen the County's position and better protect the public interest through our involvement.

Sincerely,

Sherri Loveland and Margaret Henke

Co-Chairs