



Legislation Text

File #: 2020-0176, **Version:** 1

To: The Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, The Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Water Agency

Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, Sonoma County Water Agency

Staff Name and Phone Number: Louisa Morris, 565-1537; Grant Davis, 526-5370

Vote Requirement: 4/5th

Supervisory District(s): Fifth District

Title:

Gloeckner Turner Ranch Conservation Easement

Recommended Action:

- A) Authorize \$15,000 towards the purchase price of the Gloeckner Turner Ranch Conservation Easement on behalf of the Sonoma County Water Agency; and
- B) Adopt a resolution of the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to:
 - i) Authorize up to \$4,500,000 and escrow costs for the acquisition of the Gloeckner Turner Ranch property conservation easement;
 - ii) Determine that the acquisition is consistent with the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's Expenditure Plan;
 - iii) Make certain determinations pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act;
 - iv) Authorize all other actions to complete this transaction.

(Fifth District) (4/5th Vote Required)

Executive Summary:

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is proposing to purchase a conservation easement over the 3,364-acre Gloeckner Turner Ranch property west of Cloverdale. The conservation easement will protect the natural, scenic, and agricultural values of the property, which is located on Rockpile Road near the Cooley Ranch conservation easement held by The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and near the Lake Sonoma Recreation Area.

Discussion:

PROPERTY CHARACTERISTICS/PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE

The Gloeckner Turner Ranch Project ("Project") is the proposed acquisition of a conservation easement over a 3,364-acre property comprised of 33 legal lots - nine owned by Gloeckner Turner Vineyards, LLC and 24 owned by the Gloeckner Grandchildren, a Limited Partnership. The Ranch has been in the Gloeckner family since the 1970s and was originally a sheep ranch that is now used for cattle grazing and as a family retreat. This large ranch and its immediate neighborhood are characterized by rural residential development, vineyards, large ranches, and working forestlands, with some 160-acre rural "ranchettes" in the area. The Gloeckner Turner

Ranch is close to Lake Sonoma as well as the Cooley Ranch, Skyhawk Ranch, Baxter Ranch, and Rancheria Creek Recesses properties (private lands with conservation easements), for a total of 42,444 acres of public and/or protected lands in the immediate area.

The terrain on the Gloeckner Turner Ranch property is generally steep with limited flat areas, mostly near Rockpile Road; the elevation ranges from approximately 750 feet to 2,000 above sea level. Views looking west over the property are stunning, and the interior offers similarly spectacular views of multiple ridgelines. The property is visible from Lake Sonoma Recreation Area and from six miles along Rockpile Road, a public road. There are many diverse habitats, including Oregon white oak and interior mixed hardwood forest, chaparral and chemise forest, Douglas fir and redwood forest, riparian woodlands, and grasslands. There are timber resources on the Property and logging has occurred in the past.

There are small serpentine hardwood areas on the property (39 acres) as well as serpentine grasslands (18 acres). The Conservation Lands Network classifies the property as part of the Sonoma Coast Range landscape unit, with 74% (2,489 acres) considered “essential,” 24% (807 acres) “important” and the remainder (68 acres) “contributing” to vital connecting habitat for wildlife. One of three identified wildlife corridors in Sonoma County runs the entire length of the property.

The property is within an identified “critical habitat linkage” connecting lands from western Marin County to Lake Sonoma and is a “Large Landscape Block,” or area of high ecological integrity that builds upon an existing regional conservation network. The large habitat “transition zones” on this property offer a wide variety of opportunities for adaptation to climate change. The headwaters of the Wheatfield Fork of the Gualala River runs northwest 2.1 miles through the property, and 3.6 miles of the headwaters of Rancheria Creek run south into Lake Sonoma. The Gualala River is an anadromous stream with threatened steelhead. There are also numerous springs and waterfalls throughout the property.

Structures on Gloeckner Turner Ranch include a large, new estate home, small caretaker house, 100-year old hunting cabin, barns, sheds, cabins, 23 acres of planted vineyards, fencing, and roads. There are current Williamson Act contracts on the property as well as two rock quarries.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

The conservation easement proposed by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) eliminates 29 of the possible parcels and reserves four Building Envelopes on four potential legal parcels. All of the proposed residential building envelopes are near Rockpile Road, leaving the interior of the ranch largely undeveloped. The conservation easement designates a 5.9-acre recreation area around existing cabins at “Deer Camp” on Rancheria Creek. There are 23 acres of planted vineyard on the property. Before the conservation easement, there are an additional 157 acres of plantable vineyard land. To conserve the open wildlife habitat and preserve connectivity across the landscape, the conservation easement allows only 30 of these 157 acres to be planted.

The conservation easement prohibits commercial timber harvest but allows for continued cattle grazing, using best management practices to protect riparian areas and the integrity of natural resources. The Gloeckners plan to work with CalFIRE to implement a forest management plan that will include some fuels management and prescribed burning, also offering climate change adaptation benefits. The landowners have agreed to allow up to four public tours annually, in coordination with the Sonoma County Water Agency. The public tours will benefit Sonoma County Water Agency's water education program. This property is a prime example of the headwaters of a watershed and hosts ideal salmonid habitat.

CONFORMANCE WITH ADOPTED PLANS

Connecting Communities and the Land

The Project furthers objectives in Ag + Open Space's acquisition plan in multiple categories as noted below:

- **Water, Wildlife and Natural Areas**, specifically to preserve natural systems and lands that provide viable habitat linkages for wildlife.
- **Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside**s, specifically to protect lands with prominent natural features that contribute to the unique identity of a community, protect lands visible from highly traveled roads that contribute to the rural character and sense of place, protect lands that have unique open space features that are essential to preserving the county's distinct visual character.
- **Farms and Ranches**, specifically to protect agricultural lands near the urban edge and to preserve the diverse agricultural character and heritage of Sonoma County.

Sonoma County General Plan 2020

The Project furthers several goals and policies in Sonoma County's General Plan 2020, specifically in the Land Use, Open Space and Resource Conservation, Agricultural Resource, and Water Resources Elements, including the following:

- Protect Sonoma County's water resources on a sustainable yield basis that avoids longterm declines in available surface and groundwater resources or water quality. (Goal LU-8)
- Preservation of important scenic features. (Goal LU-10)
- Encourage conservation of undeveloped land, open space, and agricultural lands, protection of water and soil quality, restoration of ecosystems, and minimization or elimination of the disruption of existing natural ecosystems and flood plains. (Policy LU-11f)
- Identify and preserve roadside landscapes that have a high visual quality as they contribute to the living environment of local residents and to the County's tourism economy. (Goal OSRC-3)
- Preserve the unique rural and natural character of Sonoma County for residents, businesses, visitors and future generations. (Goal OSRC-6)
- Protect and enhance the County's natural habitats and diverse plant and animal communities. (Goal OSRC-7)
- Identify and protect native vegetation and wildlife, particularly occurrences of special status species, wetlands, sensitive natural communities, woodlands, and areas of essential habitat connectivity. (Objective OSRC-7.1)
- Maintain connectivity between natural habitat areas. (Objective OSRC-7.5)
- In areas outside the Urban Service Areas, encourage property owners to utilize wildlife friendly fencing. (Policy OSRC-7d)
- Support acquisition of conservation easements or fee title by the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District of designated Biotic Habitat Areas. (Policy OSRC-7f)
- Protect and enhance Riparian Corridors and functions along streams, balancing the need for agricultural production, urban development, timber and mining operations, and other land uses with the preservation of riparian vegetation, protection of water resources, flood control, bank stabilization, and other riparian functions and values. (Goal OSRC-8)

- Protect, restore, and enhance the quality of surface and groundwater resources to meet the needs of all reasonable beneficial uses. (Objective WR-1)
- Use voluntary purchase or transfer of development rights programs to limit intrusion of residential development into agricultural lands. (Policy AR-2d)

Ag + Open Space's Expenditure Plan

The Project is consistent with Ag + Open Space's Expenditure Plan because it preserves biotic habitat areas, scenic landscape units and scenic corridors, and agriculturally productive land.

APPRAISAL AND FISCAL OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

Appraiser Chris Bell prepared two full narrative appraisals of the Gloeckner Turner and Gloeckner Grandchildren conservation easement, with a date of valuation of September 15, 2019. The appraiser determined that the highest and best use of the property was for agricultural use and rural residential development of up to 33 lots (zoned RRD), and then selling the Ranch as up to 33 rural residential home sites with agriculture. The appraiser concluded the estimated market value of the conservation easement was \$9,455,000.

Ag + Open Space staff and MAI appraiser Dana Burwell reviewed the appraisals and concluded they met the Appraisal Standards and Guidelines. The Fiscal Oversight Commission reviewed and accepted the appraisals at its November 21, 2019 meeting (Resolution # 2019-005).

PURCHASE AGREEMENT AND PURCHASE PRICE

The landowners and Ag + Open Space have negotiated a purchase price for the conservation easement of \$5,015,000, contingent upon Board of Directors approval, standard contingencies, and the following conditions: (1) Sonoma Land Trust contributes \$500,000 toward the purchase price; (2) Sonoma County Water Agency contributes \$15,000 toward the purchase price; and (3) Ag + Open Space contributes \$4,500,000 toward the purchase price.

Escrow/Closing

Close of escrow for the acquisition of the property is on or before the end of this fiscal year (June 30, 2020).

CEQA

Pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.28, the acquisition of this conservation easement is exempt from CEQA because the purpose of the acquisition is to preserve the natural condition of the property including plant and animal habitats; restoration of natural conditions including plant and animal habitats; for continuing agricultural use of the land; prevention of encroachment of development into flood plains; preservation of historical resources, preservation of open space or lands for park purposes.

Prior Board Actions:

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 19-20 Adopted	FY20-21 Projected	FY 21-22 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$5,015,000		
Additional Appropriation Requested	0		
Total Expenditures	\$5,015,000		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF (Sonoma County Water Agency)	\$15,000		

State/Federal/Private (Sonoma Land Trust)	\$500,000		
Fees/Other	\$4,500,000		
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$5,015,000		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Ag + Open Space has adequate appropriations in its FY 19-20 budget for its \$4,500,000 conservation easement acquisition contribution. The remaining \$515,000 will be contributed by Sonoma County Water Agency (\$15,000) and Sonoma Land Trust (\$500,000).

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**Attachments:**

1. General Plan Map 2020
2. Location Map
3. Site Map
4. Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

1. Certificate of Acceptance
2. Notice of Exemption
3. Conservation Easement