

Friends of the North Coast
Rural Bonny Doon Association

April 18, 2024

Zachary Ormsby, Field Manager
Benjamin Hoke, Assistant Field Manager
BLM Central Coast Field Office
Attn: Cotoni-Coast Dairies RMPA/EA
940 2nd Ave., Marina, CA 93933-6009
blm_ca_cotoni_coast_dairies@blm.gov

Re: Comment Letter re Project for Northern Parking Area and Trailhead and Draft Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-CA-C090-2023-0001-EA) at Cotoni-Coast Dairies, a Unit of the California Coastal National Monument

Dear Messrs. Ormsby and Hoke:

Friends of the North Coast (“FONC”) and Rural Bonny Doon Association (“RBDA”) (and collectively “Commenting Parties”) provide the following Comment Letter to BLM’s Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Project denominated: Northern Parking Area and Trailhead at Cotoni-Coast Dairies unit (“C-CD”) of the California Coastal National Monument (“CCNM”). This Draft EA “analyzes construction of only a northern parking area following the IBLA’s remand of MA-REC-23 for further analysis,” and “the purpose for the proposed action is to establish public parking to support public access in Recreation Management Zone 1 (RMZ 1), while ensuring proper care for resources, objects, and values of the C-CD unit of the California Coastal National Monument.” (EA:7)

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Commenting Parties continue to believe that an Access Road from Cement Plant Road along the base of the knoll, around its inland side, and up the draw to BLM’s proposed knoll-top Northern Parking Area is a viable and superior Alternative. A visual of this “Preferred Access for Knoll Parking” is on the next page. *This is preferable even if no parking is included at the Barn Site level.* We respectfully request BLM to consider that Alternative in either of the two following configurations, in order of our preference:

- (1) **(Strongly preferred)** Enter and exit at the Barn Site level’s metal gate south of the cattle chute (see Fig. 4, EA p.21), but with roadway angling promptly to the base of the knoll and continuing inland until approaching the Proposed Trail shown on both of BLM’s Alternatives, and then paralleling the Proposed Trail heading up the draw to the knoll-top Trailhead and Parking Area. We could also support coordinated creation of an emergency or temporary access in the area where trees were removed along Cement Plant Road approximately 60 feet north of Warrenella Road (*e.g.*, if

needed in the event of fire, earthquake, temporary runoff inundation, or temporary need of the grazing operator). Signage for exit would include “right turn only.”

- (2) Enter at the Barn Site level with a one-way roadway in the same location as our configuration (1) above and depart the knoll-top Parking Area with “right turn only” signage when exiting 60 feet north of Warrenella Road.

This alternative would largely solve the three major practical issues related to Alternatives 1 and 2 in the EA, namely the traffic safety hazards of the narrow stretch of Cement Plant Road south of our Alternative Access, avoidance of harm to the Monarch Overwintering Site, and adequate parking capacity now and in the future.

This alternative also provides the greatest flexibility for BLM’s future planning and previously expressed need for at least some parking at the Barn Site level as far away from the grazing operation as possible while leaving the vast majority of the pasture and corral area untouched, as discussed later in this Comment Letter.

AVOIDANCE OF TRAFFIC SAFETY HAZARDS IN THE NARROW STRETCH

Commenting Parties have previously raised the serious traffic safety hazard resulting from the narrow stretch of Cement Plant Road southbound past the Barn Site Alternative Access. This narrow stretch will be encountered by visitors accessing via either BLM Alternative 1 or BLM Alternative 2. The narrow stretch precludes wide vehicles (*e.g.*, RVs, vans, and trucks) from passing each other when travelling in opposite directions per the following video links. <https://youtu.be/6wGkWoXGxpw>
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kyHte2XOHowq0Mn7BcgOMFiwR4VLV3L9/view?usp=drivesdk>. Even sedans have to utilize the unpaved shoulder/drainage area to pass. This problem will be exacerbated by the new information in this 3/19/2024 EA that BLM now projects annual visitation to be 30% more than its 2020 estimate, *i.e.*, up from 250,000 to 325,000. There will be concomitant increase in the number of vehicles attempting to travel both ways on the narrow stretch.¹ This narrow stretch hazard can be avoided by utilizing the Access proposed by the Community².

¹ BLM’s EA estimates that in Phase 1 visitation will only be 190,000 but creates no method for limiting visitation to that level. In any event, the hazard of the narrow stretch will exist even at the 190,000 visitor level and will only get worse as annual visitation approaches 325,000 over time.

² There are other traffic safety hazards identified (but not solved) in BLM’s EA. These relate primarily to Highway 1 and were largely addressed in Davenport North Coast Association’s (DNCA) Comment Letter and will be briefly addressed later in this Comment Letter. They were also identified in Commenting Parties’ Peer Review of the BLM Traffic Study. This Peer Review was done by Traffic Engineer Keith Higgins and submitted to BLM via FONC’s attorney on 8/17/2020 but was not considered. It was not included in the Administrative Record provided by BLM to the IBLA; nor was it ever included in the “DOCUMENTS” section of BLM’s webpages on the C-CD RMPA-EA process. **In any event, Commenting Parties are requesting BLM to please consider the Higgins Peer Review as part of this process.**

RESTORATION AND PROTECTION OF MONARCH OVERWINTERING HABITAT

EcoSystems West Ecologist Justin Davilla has provided a letter (attached separately) analyzing the history and current situation regarding Monarch Overwintering Site 3009 along Cement Plant Road north of Warrenella Road. Please read and consider it as you finalize the 3/19/2024 and make a final decision on whether to utilize the Community's Preferred Access to Knoll Parking so as to avoid further harm to Monarch habitat. It is Mr. Davilla's opinion that the statement in the EA that "impacts to wildlife habitat would be less than significant" is unwarranted as applied to monarchs at Overwintering Site 3009. This is additionally true because a viable alternative has been proposed which does not require the removal of any monarch roost or wind buffer trees, as shown in the Community's Preferred Access for Knoll Parking.

Mr. Davilla further explains that the four large eucalyptus that were removed late summer 2022 were in a location that may have provided additional over-wintering habitat and/or wind protection to the overwintering roost(s). However, this cannot be evaluated directly as these trees were removed prior to obtaining contemporary baseline data on the overwintering population prior to removal. The Xerces Society has provided information that as many as 5000 monarchs occupied this location in the late 1980s, but overall, the Western monarch population has decreased significantly from more than 3 million to less than 300,000 currently. Although classified as an invasive species by the California Invasive Plant Council (2024) and USDA (2022), these eucalyptus trees comprised "Especially Valuable Habitat" (EVH) as defined under Section 30107.5 of the California Coastal Act. Because of their designation as EVH, eucalyptus supporting monarch overwintering monarchy roosts are considered Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHA) under the Coastal Act. This was further confirmed after reviewing photographs provided by FONC of these four trees prior to, and during their removal. The removal of these eucalyptus trees has the potential to adversely affect the suitability of the grove on the east side of Cement Plant Road to support overwintering Monarchs. It also makes avoidance of damage or destruction to the remaining trees a greater necessity so as to maintain the ongoing suitability of the grove to monarch butterflies. Removal of overwintering monarch roost habitat in the Coastal Zone would typically be evaluated by Coastal Commission staff as part of their Consistency Determination process for projects with a federal lead agency (BLM). In general, removal or direct impacts to ESHA in the Coastal Zone are only permissible for uses "dependent on those resources." Moreover, development in areas adjacent to ESHA are required to be "sited and designed to prevent impacts which would significantly degrade those areas, and shall be compatible with the continuance of those habitat and recreation areas." Categories of resources dependent uses are not listed in the Coastal Act. It is unclear what element of the driveway access to the Knoll Parking Area is "resource dependent requiring removal of trees for access when a viable alternative has been proposed to avoid this impact, or direct impacts to other sensitive habitats, including Agua Puerca Creek and its associated riparian corridor.

Scientists say monarch butterflies are at critically low levels in western states and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service ("USFWS) has already declared the monarch to be a "candidate" species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The USFWS states that it plans to propose the monarch for listing in fiscal year 2024 if listing is still warranted (as prioritized by the National Listing Workplan). On January 30, 2024 Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

(described as a “partner” by BLM in its EA) announced by Press Release that the number of western monarch butterflies overwintering in California dropped by 30% last year. So there would appear to be no basis for changing the most recent USFWS Species Assessment and Listing Priority form from 2022 which states: “On the basis of the best scientific and commercial information available, we find that the petitioned action to list the monarch butterfly under the Act is warranted.” The USFWS has signed a settlement agreement with Center for Biological Diversity committing to submit to the Federal Register for publication either a warranted or not warranted finding for the monarch butterfly by no later than December 4, 2024. The EA should make the public aware of this.

In the meantime the USFWS has developed the Candidate Conservation Program to support candidate species awaiting ESA protections. What actions, if any, has BLM undertaken with regard to the Candidate Conservation Program?

To further serve the interests of the public, the EA should disclose that Xerces gave a notice to BLM in November 2022 that the trees BLM proposes to remove as part of Alternative 1 (as well as any additional trees to be removed under Alternative 2³) are in a Monarch Overwintering Site 3009 identified since the early 1990’s by Xerces and the State CNDDB Listing. BLM’s EA does not mention the Two Western Monarch Habitat Assessments made in November 2022 the results of which have established that there is an overwintering site for Monarchs in the area where BLM removed four mature Eucalyptus Trees and rough graded its proposed Warrenella Gate Parking Area (13 days before the IBLA Decision). This work occurred, and the Monarch overwintering site is located, in the adjoining large Grove lining both sides of Cement Plant Road north of Warrenella Road. These Assessments are described in detail in Commenting Parties Scoping Comment filed in November 2022. Commenting Parties request that those Assessments and the images shared in the Groundswell Ecology email to Xerces and others on 11/22/2022 be made part of the Administrative Record.

The EA also states that “(a)t least four large eucalyptus (blue gum) trees on the east side of Cement Plant Road would have to be removed to construct the driveway for the double loop site design” that comprises Alternative 1. The EA concludes that this will result in “*moderate* (direct) adverse impacts on monarch butterfly habitat.” The failure of the EA to inform and show the public and the decision makers that the four trees (or more) to be removed are necessarily in close proximity to the five clusters recorded by Groundswell Ecology the November 2022 Western Monarch Overwintering Habitat Assessment conflicts with any basis for BLM to conclude that the direct adverse impacts on monarch butterfly (overwintering) habitat will be “*moderate*.” This is further problematic given that BLM does not describe the method for determining how many trees would need to be taken down and how much grading would be needed to construct this driveway which must rise an estimated 10-12 feet in elevation from Cement Plant Road to the knoll top Parking Lot (see photographs attached to Davilla Letter).

The trees planned for removal or impacted under Alternative 1 were identified to support monarchs by Groundswell Ecology’s November 2022 Habitat Assessment. If those additional

³ Four monarch habitat trees were already removed by BLM in August 2022 to enable the exit utilized by Alternative 2.

trees are removed, it is unclear whether impacts will be a “moderate” as stated, as the response of next year’s migratory monarchs cannot be predicted. It is possible that monarchs will move to adjacent trees but it is equally likely that the grove architecture will no longer support roosting monarchs at this location. It can only be determined with certainty that the grove will undergo a significant structural change and the impacts to monarchs are undetermined, but potentially significant and unavoidable.

Nor does the statement that “BLM is currently working with partners at the Xerces Society and Groundswell Ecology to support ongoing efforts to restore and protect habitat for monarchs” commit BLM to perform those efforts at this site (Overwintering Site 3009) rather than other sites such as the Overwintering site near the Davenport Fire Station. Note that Monarchs are not mentioned in the 2020 EA for the RMPA and the “wildlife surveys” mentioned in this March 19, 2024 EA as being in the RMPA are not in the form of commitments but only “based on BLM management needs and capacity, and partnership/stakeholder interest and abilities.” Binding commitments are warranted in general and also in light of the fact that the 2023 Western Monarch Count for Overwintering Site 3009 was down to 18 from the 2022 count of 183.

BLM should also specifically commit to the same protections for Monarchs as it has set forth in Attachment 1 for bird nests.

ADEQUATE PARKING CAPACITY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

BLM’s EA also incorporates changes in the C-CD visitor use estimates following the coronavirus pandemic (p.9). Updated Appendix G states that at full buildout, the BLM estimates that up to 325,000 people will visit C-CD annually and that annual visitation numbers projected for full buildout will not be reached for several years. Projected daily use of the C-CD during *average summer weekends was estimated at 1,500 visitors*. Updated Appendix G concludes by recommending that the BLM pursue development of parking areas on C-CD unit of the CCNM designed to *accommodate up to 167 standard vehicles* and 4 trailer spaces to minimize the impacts of overflow parking on adjacent County roads and State Route 1 (emphasis added). **Please explain why the estimate of 1,500 visitors on an average summer weekend and the need to accommodate parking for 167 standard vehicles remained the same in the Updated Appendix G as they were in the original Appendix G even though the projected annual visitation increased by 30% from 250,000 to 325,000.** Wouldn’t they be expected to increase roughly 30% as well so that BLM should be seeking to accommodate 217 standard vehicles?

The Updated Focused Traffic Study used average duration of stay in a parking spot as 1.5 hours (based it states on the RMPA). The original Traffic Study used average duration of 2 hours. **Please explain the basis for this estimated quicker turnover of parking spaces than was estimated in 2020.** This difference may account for at least part of the reduction in parking demand, but how is it justified? Furthermore, we concur with DNCA’s comments that because the daily weekend use figure is based on equally dividing the weekend use across the year, the calculation does not accurately capture the higher use during the summer months. Please be sure to weight the number of visitors to reflect higher use during summer months.

Please also respond to the questions raised by DNCA and Coin Hannon as well as the visitation estimation questions raised in the Scoping Letter from DNCA, FONC, AND RBDA.

RANGE AND EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

Range of Alternatives

NEPA requires that in the EA an agency must evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to the agency's proposed action, to allow decision-makers and the public to evaluate different ways of accomplishing an agency goal. One agency goal that BLM agreed to in accepting the Coastal Commission Concurrence Determination requires at p31 that the C-CD Plan be carried out in a manner protecting ESHA (Environmentally Sensitive Areas) as required by the Coastal Act at Section 30240. Furthermore, activities proposed adjacent to ESHA would have to be undertaken in a manner that would protect, and where feasible, restore, and be compatible with the continuance of those habitats, thereby protecting the C-CD property's ESHAs. *The Coastal Commission has determined on many occasions that Monarch habitat is ESHA.*

None of the Alternatives for creating a Northern Entrance Parking Area protect the Monarch Overwintering Habitat along Cement Plant Road north of Warrenella Road. Commenting Parties submitted a "Preferred Northern Entrance Package" along with their Scoping Comments for this process and that Alternative protects the Monarch Overwintering Habitat by an Access near the foot of the knoll proceeding around the inland side of the knoll and up the draw to BLM's knoll-top parking area.

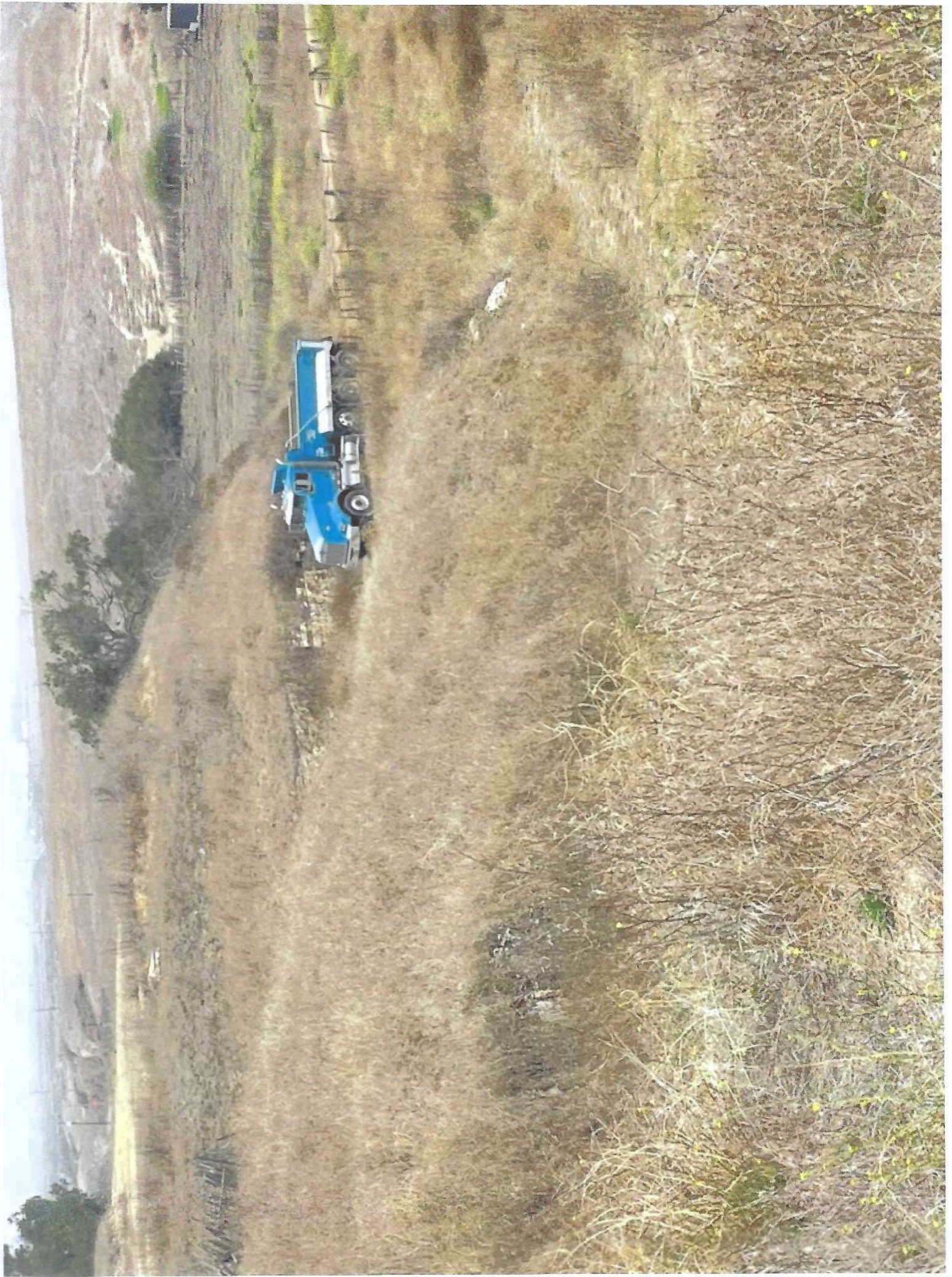
On October 30, 2023 DNCA emailed you a Summary of its Preliminary Comments on the Northern Access you showed at the Meeting you conducted in Davenport on September 26, 2023. That Summary stated:

3. We strongly prefer that all BLM traffic arrive and exit via the Highway One intersection at the north end of Cement Plant Road *and arrive and exit C-CD via a drive adjacent to and at the level of the Mocettini Barn Site* (emphasis added). We believe this provides for the safest access to the monument.

That Summary also mentioned at 5.b. the possible fall back option of an entry:

at the Barn Site [level] and depart with "right turn only" signage when exiting the Knoll Site.

That Summary also attached "photos taken last week of use of the draw as a drive on the inland side of the Knoll Site." These photos show the haul route for BLM-contracted dump trucks to and from Agua Puerca Creek as being on the inland side of the knoll, travelling up and down the draw and exiting from the knoll-top site onto Cement Plant Road. A track connecting to the dump truck route at the inland tip of the knoll coming from the direction of Cement Plant Road along the north side of the knoll is also visible. The DNCA Summary noted that this would seem to indicate BLM deems the draw as suitable for interim access.





A reasonable range of alternatives should include this route, without lower level parking at this time. Instead, the EA erroneously described the Community's Alternative as "emphasiz[ing] parking near the historic barn structure" (EA p.20-21). The EA created used some alternative plan instead of using the professionally prepared Landscape Architect Plan and Notes (inserted after this page) submitted by DNCA, FONC, and RBDA which show the roadway and parking adjacent to the base of the knoll as far away from the historic barn structure and corrals as possible. From that Plan and Notes it can easily be seen that a 24-foot wide stand-alone road can be constructed on the elevated area and avoid the areas of runoff inundation and be connected directly to the haul route for the dump trucks going up the draw to the knoll top.

By the EA including development of the lower-level parking near the historic barn structure, the EA concluded this would have substantial adverse impacts to existing livestock operations, the integrity of the historic barn setting, cultural resources, and the riparian habitat (floodplain) associated with Agua Puerca Creek. In light of those considerations, the BLM eliminated this Monarch protective alternative from further analysis. This elimination from analysis was based on erroneous unauthorized revision of the Community's Alternative. Please include and analyze the Community's true Alternative based on the professional Plan it submitted as modified by the "Preferred Access for Knoll Parking" attached as the first visual at the end of this Comment Letter and DNCA's October 30, 2023 email to the Field Manager.

Evaluation of Community's Alternative

The Community's true Alternative (Site Design Concept) is described in the preceding paragraph. This Alternative protects the Monarch Overwintering Habitat and avoids dangerous narrow stretch of Cement Plant Road to the south of the Barn Site. At the same time avoids the impacts which the EA deemed disqualifying as described below.

1. Inundation Affecting Buffer of Agua Puerca Creek. The buffer for any riparian habitat associated with Agua Puerca Creek would not be adversely affected by the Community's True Alternative.

The EA states at pp.22-23 that the riparian habitat associated with Agua Puerca Creek would be adversely affected by the development of the lower-level parking because the seasonal drainage area is subject to inundation during heavy precipitation events. Lower-level parking is not included in the Community Alternative at this time, only the Access Roadway which is proposed at the base of the knoll with a buffer of well more than 195 feet from Agua Puerca Creek.

Furthermore, the riparian habitat associated with Agua Puerca Creek would not be adversely affected because BLM's Resource Management Plan includes a Vegetation/Riparian Map (RMPA Appendix Figure 3 – Vegetation - attached) which demonstrates that the Riparian Area Habitat is no more than 50-75 feet from the southern edge of the Creek, whereupon it terminates at Mocettini Barn and the actively used livestock corrals. From there to the inland edge of the knoll is approximately 320 feet, all of which is designated non-native grassland.



3-18-2022

A few things to note about this layout:

1. The parking and access road are laid out to avoid the steep slope of the mesa to the south.
2. There's a power pole on Cement Plant Road right at the entrance location which I show (approximate) in the lower left corner. Your [John Barnes] parking layout does not show the pole and it didn't appear there was enough room to put the parking entrance road on the south side of the pole.
3. The drawing shows the existing ranch fence in light blue and a proposed fence in yellow. The area of the parking impact into the coral would be about 0.29 acres.
4. There are roughly 55 parking spaces and 2 ADA spaces. You could probably squeeze in 10 more spaces or provide parallel parking in a few locations.
5. The road is 24' wide, the parking spaces 9'x18' and the turnaround has 37' Rad.



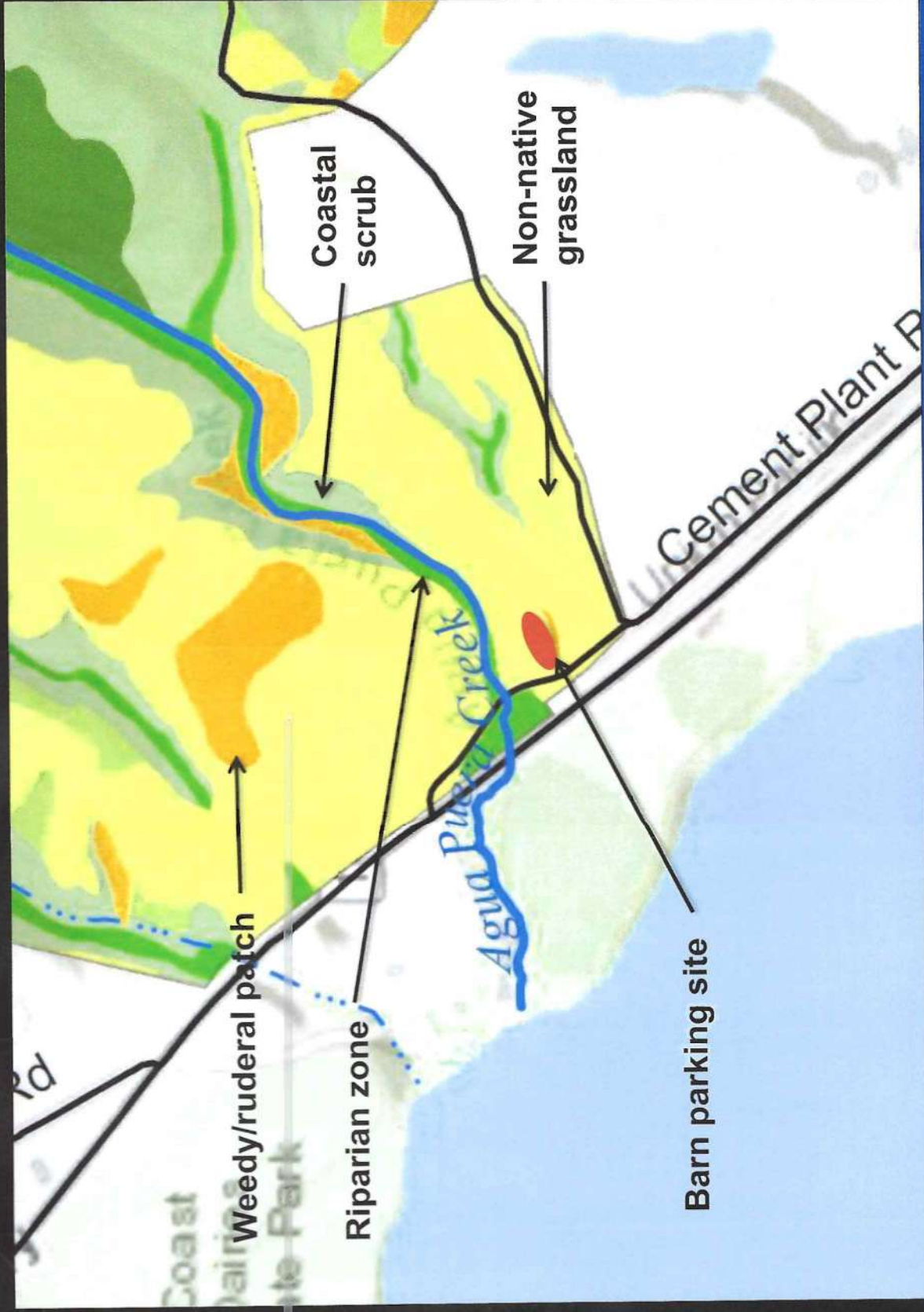
Brian A. Hannegan, ASLA

Manager of Landscape

Architecture

949 547 8596

3c.i RMPA Vegetation / Riparian Zone Map: Agua Puerca Creek



Under Santa Cruz County Code 16.30.030, in this situation, “Riparian corridor” includes only the following: “...lands within a stream channel and extending 50 feet out from each side of a perennial stream, and lands containing a riparian woodland (composed of woody plant species that typically occur in wet areas along streams or marshes - characteristic species are: Black Cottonwood, Red Alder, White Alder, Sycamore, Box Elder, Creek Dogwood, Willow.” RMPA 2.6.1 states: “The BLM determined there is no specific management direction applicable to the C-CD for these [riparian and wetland] resources established in the CCNM RMP (BLM 2005) or IMP (BLM 2014). In lieu of specific goals and objectives, or management actions, the BLM would adhere to existing policy to meet State and Federal regulations to protect riparian areas and wetlands.

At page 54 the EA states that there is a 400-foot-wide swath of annual grassland that would provide a buffer between the parking area and Agua Puerca Creek, indicating that The grassland will act as a filter strip to capture sediment, slow surface flow, and largely infiltrate (filter) the runoff into the soil. Buffers serve as transitional habitat and provide distance and physical barriers from human degradation and disturbance. The EA has chosen a 9.5” in 24 hr. storm to show inundation of the corral area used by the cattle operation and the adverse effect on the buffer. Please explain why this was the model storm chosen and the name, credentials, and any underlying report identifying the “nearest statistical record.”

However, the EA goes on to acknowledge that “Studies examining the effectiveness of riparian buffers have determined that 30-60m (97.5-195 feet) wide riparian buffer strips will effectively protect water resources through physical and chemical filtration processes” (Davies & Nelson 1994; Brosofske et al. 1997, Wenger & Fowler 2000).

The EA expresses concern about “the riparian habitat (floodplain) associated with Agua Puerca Creek” as being a “consideration” justifying the BLM to eliminate the Community’s alternative including parking from further analysis. The Community’s Preferred Access to Knoll Parking included only the Access Road as of at least October 30, 2023 communication to the Field Manager.⁴ **There is far more than 195 feet (closer to 300 feet) between the Community’s Preferred Access to Knoll Parking so this consideration cannot be a basis for eliminating the Community’s alternative.**

Is the need for an adequate buffer during infrequent times of inundation a seasonal matter? We note Colin Hannon’s personal comment 6 on the 3/19/2024 EA which pointed out that:

6. The document rules out an entrance approach from or parking at the level of the Mocettini barn due to rainfall inundation concerns and impacts on the cattle operations. These are both seasonal issues. It is possible that an access at that level could provide summer peak overflow and RV parking and future barn/visitor

⁴ It is also located on the elevated area out of the flood plain, even under the 2D Model storm of 9.5 inches in 24 hours.

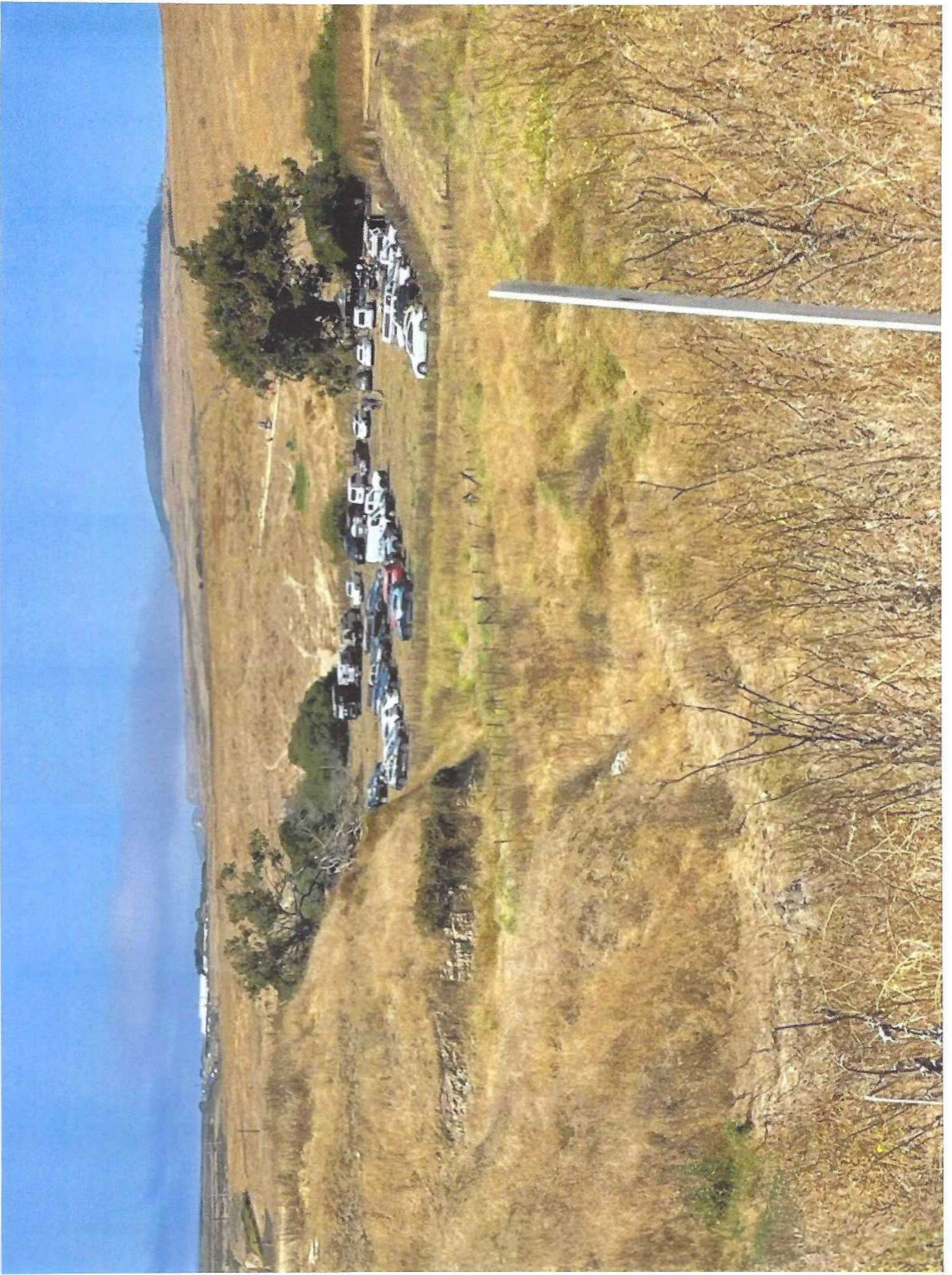
center parking without impacting the cattle operation or getting stuck in the mud. It is well worth considering the proposal for a road accessing the knoll from below and/or parking on that level put forward by Jonathan Wittwer and FONC if only as a seasonal option (and it obviously works as BLM has used that area in the dry season for large scale event parking multiple times for trail building events etc). It could also potentially avoid the need to cut down more of the beautiful Eucalyptus trees that would also impact the soon to be listed as threatened Monarch Butterfly's overwintering habitat there.

This seems to be a good point and would also apply to concerns about inundation on buffering for the Riparian Habitat at Agua Puerca Creek which is also seasonal. Please inform the public if it is correct that the cattle operation is in place only from November 1 – June 1. A photo of one of the "large scale event parking" occurrences near the end of October 2023 is attached after this page. Could this occur in the heavier visitation periods of late spring, summer, and early fall?

Furthermore, inundation during heavy precipitation events doesn't reach Access Roadway at base of knoll because the Access Road is at a higher elevation. By review of the Landscape Architect's professional drawing of the Community's lower level Access Road (at the time with parking along each side), because it is to scale, it demonstrates that there is room for the 24-foot wide Access Road outside of the inundated area. See EA page 24 along with the same photo and another marked to delineate non-inundated area (visuals attached after this page). The EA shows photos of a 2024 inundation (described as following approximately 2.5 inches of rainfall over 24-hours from January 21 to January 22, 2024). The pasture was inundated and a large volume of surface water was observed flowing through the corrals onto Cement Plant Road and toward Agua Puerca Creek. However, the photo shows the Access Roadway location not inundated. Commenting Parties also provide the following photos (copies attached after this page) of the January 8-9, 2023 storm inundation and next day dry-off which also shows the proposed Access Roadway location not inundated. In other words, the pasture and corral area drains rapidly. See comparison photo from January 10, 2023 following the large storm of the preceding days where the inundation of the day before has disappeared.

Additionally both of BLM's Alternatives include at minimum a Trail around the inland side of the knoll which is the only access from the knoll-top parking lot. Evidently BLM relies on that area not being harmed by being inundated. BLM's planned trailhead location and connection to trails and trails themselves will need to be protected from these kinds of runoff situations as will the restored barn.

The EA states at pp.22-23 that the riparian habitat associated with Agua Puerca Creek would also be adversely affected by the development of the lower-level parking because the seasonal drainage area is subject to inundation during heavy precipitation events. Lower-level parking is not included in the Community Site Design Concept at this time. The Access



Yellow line delineates elevated area free from inundation

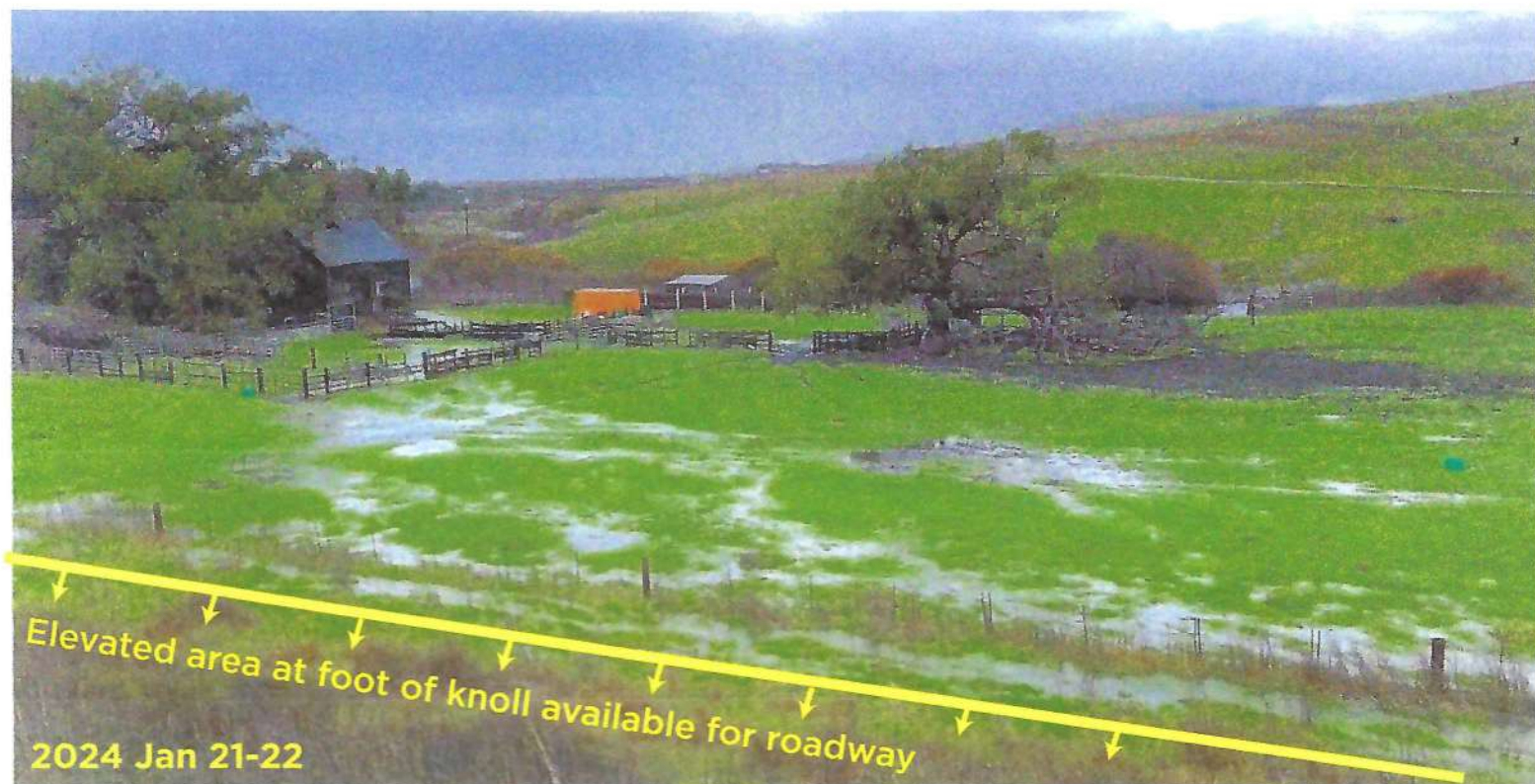


Figure 7. Grassland pasture and livestock corrals with precipitation induced flooding (BLM 2024).
2.5 inches of rainfall over 24-hours from January 21-22, 2024 - EA page 24

In BLM's "two-dimensional (2D) precipitation induced flooding model" shown on the right from EA p.23, BLM stated it used the nearest statistical records and a 9.5-inch storm over a 24-hour period.

BLM should inform the public as to the basis for using that storm and provide the name, credentials, and any underlying report identifying the "nearest statistical record" and reason for the model storm selected."



Fig 2. Two-dimensional model for a 9.5-inch storm over a 24-hour period. EA page 23

Roadway itself is proposed at a higher elevation.⁵ The EA has chosen a 9.5” in 24 hr. storm to show inundation of the corral area used by the cattle operation. The Community’s proposed Access Roadway location along the northern side of the base of the knoll is not inundated in the visual shown on EA page 23. The EA also shows photos of a 2024 inundation (following approximately 2.5 inches of rainfall over 24-hours from January 21 to January 22, 2024). The pasture proposed for the parking area was inundated and a large volume of surface water was observed flowing through the corrals onto Cement Plant Road and toward Agua Puerca Creek. However, the photo shows the Access Roadway location not inundated. Commenting Parties also provide photos of the January 8-9, 2023 storm inundation and next day dry-off which also shows the proposed Access Roadway location not inundated (next6 page).

In addition to the protection of higher elevation, in 2020 a drainage swale was in place which protected the corrals, the Cheese Barn, and the inland side of the knoll. See photo taken January 22, 2020 (next page).

Claimed insufficiency of Sight Distance for exit is inconsistent with applicable regulations. At page 25 the EA says: “the location of the driveway for the lower parking area would have insufficient line of sight distance for traffic coming from the left (northbound on Cement Plant Road).” Note that BLM’s original Traffic Study done by W-Trans concluded on pages 8-9 that at Warrenella Gate a sight distance of 150 feet was needed for a private road access to intersect along this stretch of Cement Plant Road using a speed of 25 mph (even though admitting most drivers would be comfortable only at 15-20 mph). However, the UPDATED Focused Traffic Study also done by W-Trans found that 240 feet of corner sight distance for a public road approach at 25 mph would be needed and that only 190 feet existed (even though “[d]uring a field visit in October 2023, six drivers were observed traveling at an average speed of 12 mph, with all traveling under 20 mph). In both instances W-Trans informed the public that the basis was the Caltrans *Highway Design Manual*. The Highway Design Manual does not contain a 240 foot sight distance requirement for any design speed.

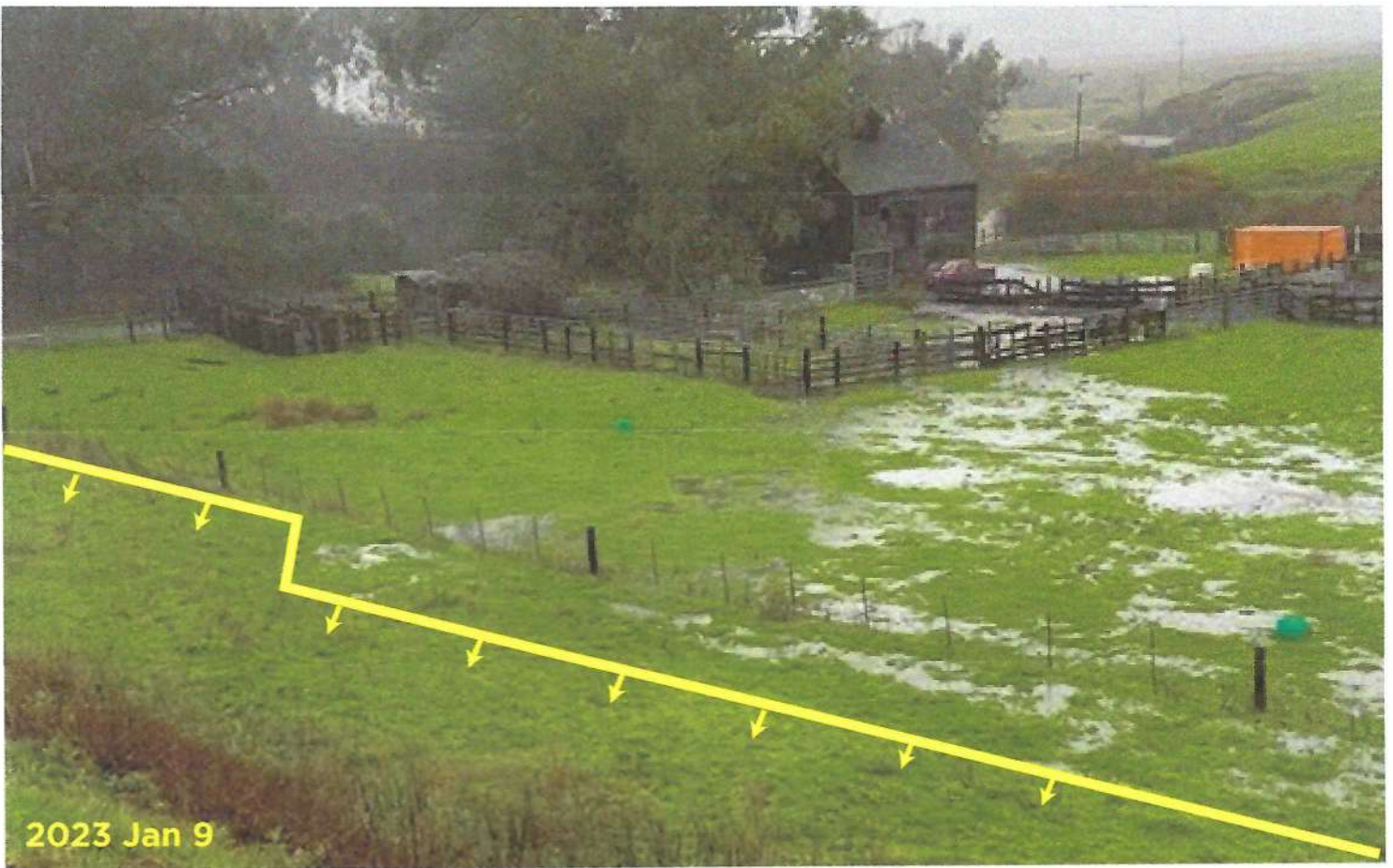
James C. Jeffery III, the Traffic Engineer we used in the IBLA case, has provided Friends of the North Coast with a written analysis (copy separately – and your reading requested) in which he concludes:

In accordance with the analysis above, using design speeds of 15 - 20 MPH, and even in the very unlikely situation that a vehicle were proceeding at 25 MPH, there would be adequate sight distance under the Caltrans *Highway Design Manual*. My conclusion is that there is clearly sufficient sight distance for northbound traffic as to both ingress and right turn only egress as to that driveway [.

Mr. Jeffery further states that with his decades of experience writing sight distance reports for the County of Santa Cruz, he has only used 15-20 MPH for his sight distance design speeds as to the many roads he evaluated for sufficiency of sight distance similar to Cement

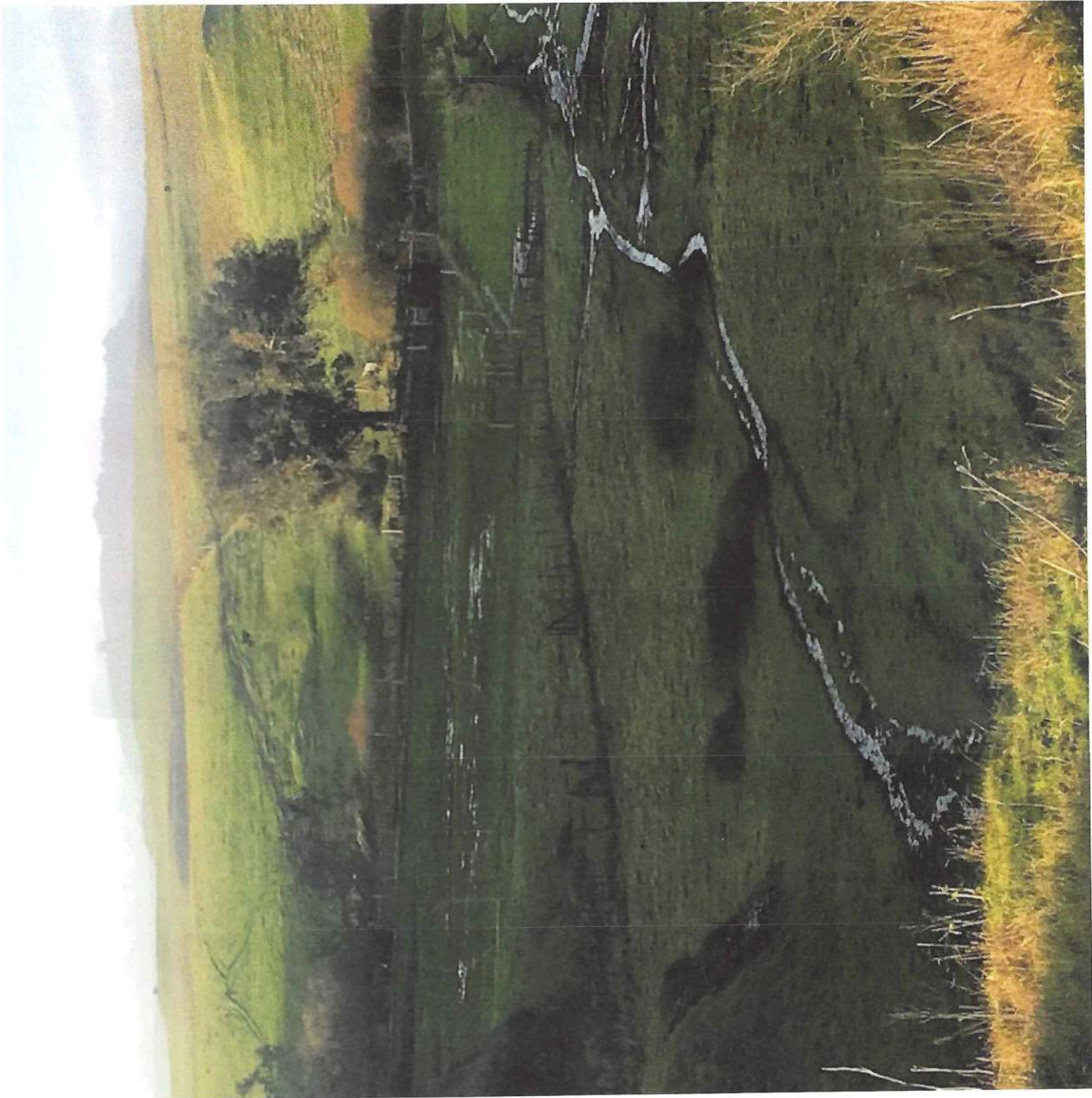
⁵ Note that on EA p. 21 our proposed parking lot is inaccurately shown further north of the base of the knoll than drawn and we ultimately eliminated the loop at the end and connected to the road up to the knoll-top parking which BLM shows on EA p. 22.

During the 2023 storms that were a federally declared a disaster



Within a 24-hour period, the water drained quickly:





Plant Road. The BLM 2020 FINAL Traffic Study and the 12/20/2023 Updated Focused Traffic Study were both done by W-Trans. In both the reader is informed that the sight distance determination was pursuant to

Substantial adverse impacts to existing livestock operations were based on lower level parking lots being built – not the case under this Community Alternative. The EA’s finding of substantial adverse effect is based on its erroneous assertion that the Community’s Alternative “emphasized parking near the historic barn structure” (EA p.20-21). As explained above the Community’s Alternative has no parking on the lower level and the road access to the knoll parking is as far away as possible at the base of the knoll. Note also that the livestock are only present from November 1 to June 1.

Substantial adverse impacts to the integrity of the historic barn setting, and cultural resources were based on lower level parking lots being built– not the case under this Community Alternative. The EA’s finding of substantial adverse effect is AGAIN based on its erroneous assertion that the Community’s Alternative “emphasized parking near the historic barn structure” (EA p.20-21). As explained above the Community’s Alternative has no parking on the lower level and the road access to the knoll parking is as far away as possible at the base of the knoll, leaving the integrity of the historic barn setting and cultural resources unaffected.

Please also respond to the questions raised in our Scoping Letter including the below concerns.

1. Scope on EA p.8 omits IBLA-identified “Greater impacts on wildlife because “long-term impact on wildlife” will depend, in part, on the “distribution of the trails and parking areas.” Scope also omits Lack of Southern Entrance. IBLA identified this lack as a “Detriment to the viability of the larger RMPA.”
2. LUP (RMP) (FLPMA) Conformity:
 - a. Protect natural resources; and
 - b. Baseline document still missing
3. Wouldn’t building only the Warrenella Gate Parking Area require Amendment of the RMPA Plan?

CONCLUSION

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Respectfully yours,

Friends of the North Coast


By: Jonathan Wittwer, President

Respectfully yours,

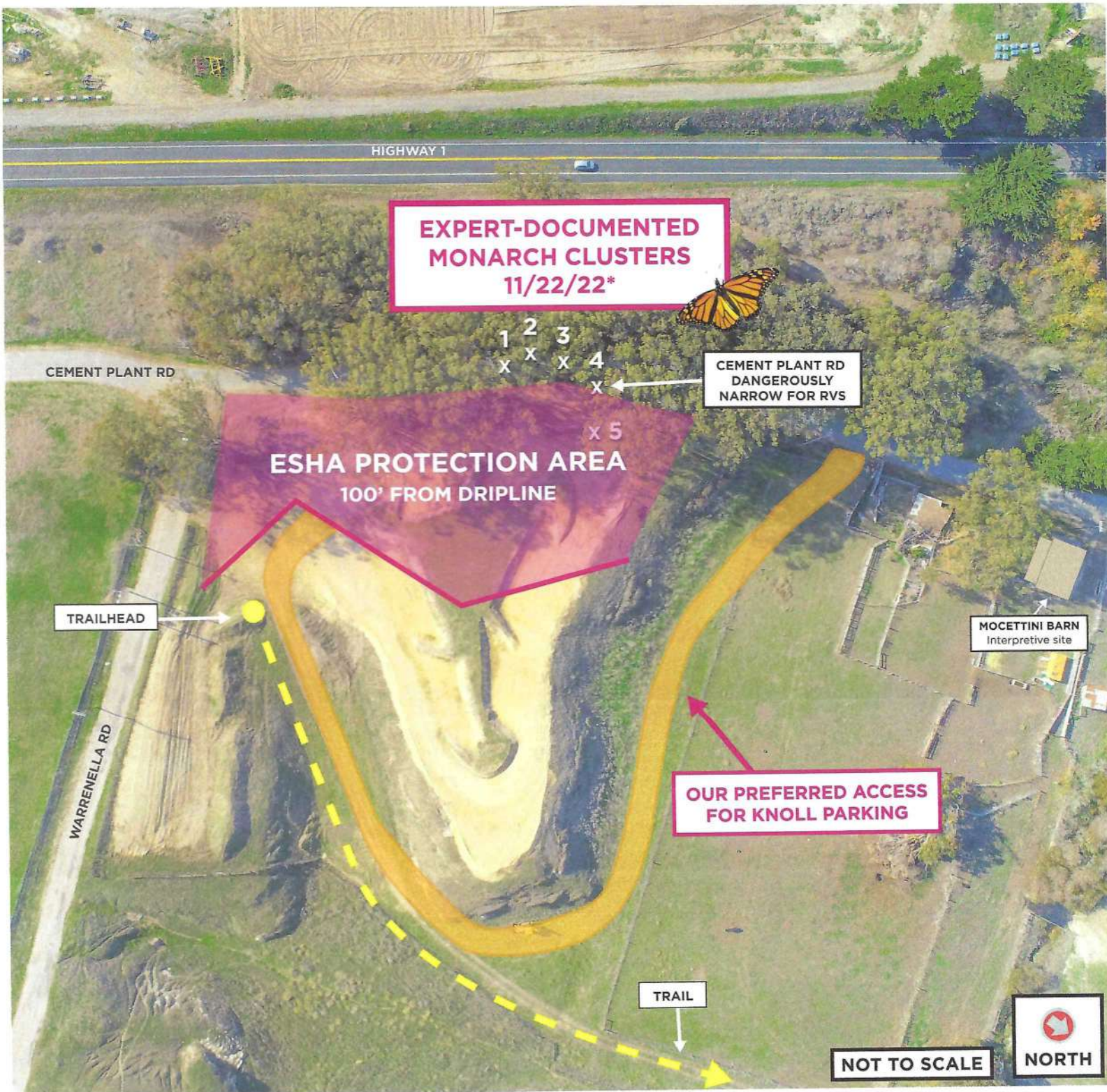
Rural Bonny Doon Association

Dave Rubin
By: Dave Rubin, Chair

Cc: The Honorable Jimmy Panetta, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Gail Pellerin, California Assemblymember
The Honorable John Laird, California State Senator-Elect
The Honorable Justin Cummings, Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
Chris Spohrer, State Parks District Director
John Olejnik, Senior Transportation Planner, Caltrans
Grace Blakeslee, Senior Planner, SCCRTC

Preferred Access for Knoll Parking

Avoids Monarch Habitat and Narrow Stretch on Cement Plant Road



* Documented by Groundswell Ecology - Bill Henry