



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 18, 2017

Joint Lawsuit Against Coastal Commission Approval of Rancho Los Robles Subdivision

*Subdivision near Elkhorn Slough would cause irreversible
damage to water supply and ecosystem*

Salinas, CA – After nine years of consistent opposition before Monterey County Board of Supervisors and the California Coastal Commission, LandWatch Monterey County (LandWatch) and Friends, Artists, and Neighbors of Elkhorn Slough (FANS) announced today that they had [filed a lawsuit](#) to overturn the recent Coastal Commission’s approval of the Rancho Los Robles subdivision. The subdivision includes a 54-lot housing project in the Elkhorn Slough watershed in North Monterey County and proposes to extract drinking water from the overdrafted Pajaro Valley Groundwater Basin. This extraction is in direct violation of Monterey County’s Local Coastal Plan that requires a sustainable water supply for all new development.

LandWatch and FANS also announced the launch of a fundraising campaign to cover the legal fees and costs associated with the lawsuit and appeal. The organizations have received an anonymous challenge grant of \$20,000 to kick off the fundraising effort.

“It is unfathomable that the Coastal Commission would approve Rancho Los Robles,” said Michael DeLapa, LandWatch’s Executive Director. “Elkhorn Slough is an environmentally sensitive habitat of statewide significance for which the Coastal Act requires its protection. We trust the court will quickly and decisively reverse the Coastal Commission’s ill-considered action.”

On November 8, 2017, the California Coastal Commission voted 7 to 5 to approve the Rancho Los Robles subdivision, against its [staff’s strong recommendation](#) to deny the project based on significant violations of the Coastal Act. In the previous 12 months, the Commission unanimously denied three similar and significantly smaller subdivisions in the Elkhorn Slough watershed based on the same legal findings of insufficient water and significant ecosystem harm. In its approval of Rancho Los Robles, the

Coastal Commission failed to adopt written findings and also ignored its own past precedent and clear scientific data.

“With this complete and unexplainable about-face by the Coastal Commission to deny other subdivisions in coastal Northern Monterey County, there is now nothing to stop unbridled development in the watershed of Elkhorn Slough,” said Mari Kloeppel, co-founder and co-chair of FANS. “Unless this ill-advised decision is reversed, the protection of our severely over-drafted aquifer and the future of the health of Elkhorn Slough will be in constant jeopardy.”

LandWatch and FANS first opposed the Rancho Los Robles project in 2008 when the Monterey County Planning Commission originally denied it. Since then, both organizations evaluated environmental documents; testified before the Monterey County Planning Commission, Board of Supervisors and Coastal Commission; wrote letters; organized residents; and now together have sued to stop the project.

Hundreds of hours in technical review and legal services have been invested by LandWatch, FANS, and its legal counsel Wittwer Parkin LLP and Stamp | Erickson. Substantial out of pocket costs have been incurred by both organizations. LandWatch and FANS decided to appeal the Coastal Commission’s decision, following an exhaustive review of the facts, precedent related to the California Coastal Act and the California Environmental Quality Act, and the legal costs and risks. It is our hope that the Superior Court will understand the legal failings of the Coastal Commission’s decision and overturn it.

Individuals, foundations or businesses can donate to the lawsuit fund electronically via [the LandWatch website](#) or by mail (Post Office Box 1876, Salinas, CA 93902-1876).

For further information, contact:

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Formed in 1998, LandWatch’s mission is to promote sound land use policies that sustain and improve our community — its long-term economic vitality, high agricultural productivity, environmental health, and social equity.

Founded in 1999, Friends, Artists and Neighbors of Elkhorn Slough is an association of citizens committed to preserving and enhancing Elkhorn Slough through public education, citizen activism, and advocacy. We are dedicated to the protection of the environmental, cultural, and agricultural integrity of the slough and its surrounding watershed as a legacy for future generations.