



LandWatch
monterey county

PRESS RELEASE

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After 18 months of good faith negotiations seeking to resolve critical land use issues with the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, LandWatch Monterey County and The Open Monterey Project must move forward with their General Plan litigation. LandWatch and The Open Monterey Project believe that the litigation is necessary to ensure adequate water supplies, protect water quality and defend open space. The Open Monterey Project, which, like LandWatch, has filed suit on the General Plan, also is moving ahead with its lawsuit challenging the adequacy and legality of the County's General Plan on issues of water, slope protection, biological resources, unanalyzed development, and violations of CEQA.

LandWatch is an advocate for responsible growth and development, which includes requiring real water before new projects are allowed. For too long, Monterey County has approved growth based upon "paper water," that is, water from mere plans for water projects or from projects that are unproven, that fail to deliver or that are over-promised. The result is that all of the County's major groundwater basins are over-

drafted, well levels are dropping, water quality is growing worse, and sea water intrusion is advancing.

LandWatch and The Open Monterey Project repeatedly urged the Board of Supervisors to adopt general-plan policies to acknowledge our water problem and to quit making it worse.

Instead, the 2010 General Plan the Board adopted denies reality. It claims the Salinas Valley Water Project provides enough water for both the urban and agricultural growth the new General Plan will allow over the next 20 years. However, the 2010 General Plan ignores the Salinas Valley Water Project's major assumptions about water demand. Critically, the Salinas Valley Water Project assumed that irrigated acreage would decline through 2030, whereas the 2010 General Plan admits it will increase by thousands of acres. And the Salinas Valley Water Project has been plagued by problems, delays, and cost overruns.

The 2010 General Plan calls for a "long term sustainable water supply" before development is permitted, but the County refused to define what that term actually means in the General Plan itself. Because it has still not defined the term, there is no guarantee that development will not further worsen water problems. After filing suit and during settlement discussions with the County over the past year-and-a-half, LandWatch and The Open Monterey Project sought a commitment that the County would guarantee objective and meaningful studies of the availability of water before further development is approved. Unfortunately, the County was unwilling to make a meaningful or enforceable commitment.

LandWatch's concerns about water supply are closely linked to the serious concerns about the County's new policies that permit agricultural cultivation on slopes exceeding 25%. Previously, steep slope cultivation was prohibited because of the erosion and water quality impacts it causes. LandWatch and The Open Monterey Project urged the Board of Supervisors to continue prohibiting steep slope cultivation, especially since poor water quality in our rivers and streams is a growing problem.

The potential impact of allowing new steep slope cultivation is huge, because there are 496,432 acres of privately owned, agriculturally zoned land in Monterey County that is at 25% slope or steeper. The General Plan's approach to this impact is to propose that a committee look into the problem sometime in the next 5 years, meanwhile admitting that demands for new cultivation on these slopes has been booming.

Not only would steep slope cultivation ruin water quality for humans and wildlife, it would open up huge tracts of un-irrigated land to new irrigated uses, destroying habitat and further accelerating water demand in our over-drafted aquifers.

Because the Board majority refuses to protect the public interest, LandWatch and The Open Monterey Project are seeking judicial resolution to the challenges we have raised.