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Commissioner Jeff Smith, Chair
Humboldt County Planning Commission
3015 H Street
Eureka, CA 95501
October 15, 2009

RE: Comments on Draft of Part 2, Chapter 4, Section 4.5 Agricultural Lands and Section 4.6 Forest Lands, of the Humboldt County General Plan Update.

Dear Chairman Smith and Commissioners,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on Sections 4.5 Agricultural Lands and 4.6 Forest Lands of the Land Use Element draft update.

As with Section 4.4 Rural Lands, we have specific comments about several proposed goals, policies, standards and implementation measures and those are attached below. However, let me begin by saying that regular attendance at these and other meetings has made it abundantly clear to us that underlying this whole process is a philosophy or theory that in some cases is at odds with the reality on the ground.

We've heard some dire pronouncements about rampant development, population explosion and global warming, all by way of explaining the urgent need to stop home building in rural areas and concentrate it in our cities. The theory is that our homes, our roads, our water usage and in some eyes, our very existence damages the environment. These are often the views of people who have already removed themselves from the country or have never lived there at all.

We don't question the goals of protecting our environment and our resources or the challenges we face as a society. What we do question is the premise that we humans can't figure out how to live in nature and be good stewards of the land both for our families and the environment we share.

The fundamental premise that drives some of the most objectionable aspects of the proposed plan is that rural lands should be converted into ever-larger open spaces and preserved, or managed on an industrial level, essentially taking rural family homes and smaller scale resource management out of the equation. We believe that this is a flawed approach that is fortunately, easily remedied by creating instead, a plan that concentrates on applying the lessons we have learned over time.

We're not just talking about land use rights, but a vision of what is good for our environment. WE are part of the diversity of nature and we can help maintain it, not by moving away from it but by acting on the knowledge we have accumulated over the years and by good sound management and living practices.

The vast majority of those who live rurally, small landowners and large landowners alike, care about the quality of where they live and work.

The General Plan Update (GPU) can play a pivotal role in moving us forward in this positive direction by incentivizing good management practices, emphasizing public education and outreach and incorporating a mission to improve the Planning Department's interaction with the public both during the GPU process and on a day-to-day basis. For the good of Humboldt County, today and tomorrow, We Urge Planners and Commissioners alike to invest in a process that brings people to the table to decide TOGETHER what path we should travel for the next 20 years.

On a more specific note, the following is a list of comments on several aspects of **4.5 Ag Lands** and **4.6 Forest Lands**:

The notion that larger parcels are the only "economically feasible" option is faulty. While large industrial resource management plays an important and historic part in Humboldt County's economy, more intensive and innovative management of smaller parcels will also certainly help to improve our economy. We favor a balanced approach to planning.

With regard to the long term profitability and availability of farmland: We hold that putting a house on land zoned for agricultural or timber uses does not decrease the availability of farmland, rather it very likely increases the likelihood it will be better managed.

- We therefore oppose **AG-G2 (A&B)** to the extent that the underlying premise is that "larger is better" and it therefore establishes policies that favor large ownership over small and is biased against part-time agriculture.
- We oppose **AG-Pxxx (A only)**, which states "parcels not originally created for residential purposes will not be recognized for residential development on lands planned for agricultural".
- We also oppose **AG-IMx (A only)**, which states "The County shall maintain an agricultural protection compliance program to enforce land use and building regulations on lands planned for agriculture (AE, AG, AGR)" This proposal emphasizes restriction, regulation and control instead of cooperation and a more proactive and incentive-based approach.
- We support **FR-G2 (A,B,C)** in that it supports "Ranches and rural homesteads making full use of the timber production potential of their lands".
- We support **FR-P4 (A,B,C)**, which supports broader use of NTMPs
- We also support **FR-P5 (B, C)**, which supports continuance and funding of forest improvement and management programs for ranches and homesteads.
- We oppose **FR-P5 (A)**, which supports the above programs for lands under NTMP plans only.
- We support **FR-P7 (A,B)**, which supports Innovative Forestland Programs"

- We strongly oppose **FR-P8 (A)**, which states “Residential uses shall be limited to individuals employed on the premises for lands planned Industrial Timber (IT) or necessary for the management of timberlands on lands planned Timber Production (T). This policy removes historic entitlements to building a house on legal parcels.
- We oppose **FR-P9 (A)**, which also restricts any new residential permits on TPZ zoned properties.
- We oppose **FR-IM4 (A,B)**, which calls for mandatory merging of same-owner contiguous parcels in Timberland Production Zones and lands enrolled under the Williamson Act. This measure, if implemented, would severely lower property values and would add uncertainty to estate planning, financing and lines of credit.

Finally, we encourage more avenues for public participation such as the formation of Community Citizen Advisory groups as per Humboldt County Framework Plan sec. 1500 through 1550 (Chapter 1-pages 17-21).

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We sincerely hope that they will be recognized in the final document. Please feel free to contact us if we can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

The Humboldt Coalition for Property Rights

CC: Scott Kelly; Bruce Emad; Ralph Faust; Mary Gearheart; Mel Krebs; Sef Murguia
Kirk Girard; Tom Hofweber; Martha Spencer.