



c/o NEC, P.O. Box 4259  
Arcata, CA 95521  
<http://www.healthyhumboldt.org>  
(707)822-6918

September 7, 2012

Humboldt County Board of Supervisors  
825 Fifth Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

Re: Humboldt County General Plan Update, Chapter 4.6, Forest Resources (FR-P9, Residences on Parcels Zoned TPZ)

Dear Supervisors,

Protecting timberlands is essential to maintain the jobs they support along with environmental qualities they preserve, such as clean water, clean air, fish and wildlife habitat, and scenic values. Continuing the conversion of timberlands to residential uses threatens the long-term viability of an industry that has historically formed the backbone of Humboldt County's economy. Over the past two decades, residential value has begun to eclipse timber value on even the largest and most productive industrial and non-industrial ownerships. Many of these parcels have been converted to uses that not only negatively impact the environment, but have placed increasing burdens on law enforcement due to illegal grading, illegal water diversions, and neighborhood nuisances.

The County's current Framework Plan policies have encouraged the use of TPZ lands for residential purposes by increasing the value of TPZ-zoned real estate while retaining the TPZ tax status that was instituted to maintain lands primarily for timber production and management.

The General Plan Update must adopt policies, standards, and implementation measures to address the lack of enforcement of state law regarding TPZ minimum parcel sizes; the County code's allowance of residences on TPZ parcels with ministerial permits and the resulting failure to evaluate and minimize impacts on imperiled salmonids and streams; and the lack of environmental review for conversion of timberlands to residential uses. The County's continued approval of such projects under the Framework Plan particularly threatens the Coho salmon, which is near the brink of extinction in many watersheds.

State and federal trustee agencies charged with protecting fish and other wildlife have commented on the inadequacies of the Framework Plan and the need to address these impacts in the General Plan Update.

Comments submitted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the GPU DEIR on June 15, 2012 explain the need for preserving agricultural and

timber lands for the long-term protection and recovery of listed species such as salmon and steelhead. According to NMFS, “allowing land-use conversion and residential activity to occur prior to a proper evaluation of whether the intended land use could have individual or cumulative significant effects on listed species and/or their habitat.”

According to NMFS, such effects include:

- Unpermitted water diversions, which can result in the drying of streams supporting juvenile salmon and steelhead in critical summer rearing periods, increasing water temperatures to levels that harm salmon and steelhead growth and survival, and blocking access to spawning and rearing habitat.
- Pollution associated with residential occupancy can adversely affect streams supporting salmon and steelhead resulting in elevated nutrient levels and algal blooms in streams, as well as introducing directly toxic compounds such as diesel fuel and pesticides to salmonid streams.
- The establishment of fuel breaks around residential structures can negatively impact salmon and steelhead habitat through removal of riparian forest, which could result in higher stream temperatures and streambank instability.

The California Department of Fish & Game pointed to various impacts in its comments dated January 18, 2008, including:

- Year-round use of dirt roads designed only for the summer dry season. Wet-weather road use on poorly-maintained dirt roads previously established and used for forest management can be a significant source of sediment input to Humboldt County streams. Logging roads and skid trails, whose wet-weather use and maintenance are subject to the California Forest Practice Rules, are often converted to private residential road systems and driveways subject to little or no regulatory oversight. These roads often become chronic sediment sources to nearby streams with significant impacts to the County’s salmon and steelhead resources.
- Streams are the principal water source for many rural residences on timberlands in the County. DFG finds stream water diversions can result in significantly decreased flows, higher water temperatures, diminished aquatic habitat values, and in extreme cases, dewatering of stream reaches. Although water diversions are subject to the authorities of the Fish and Game Code and require the issuance of lake or streambed alteration agreements with DFG, most diversions for new rural residential use appear unregulated, which combined with existing diversions, can have significant impacts to the County’s salmon and steelhead resources.
- Water quality impairment to streams from onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) effluent inputs from rural residences is another potentially significant consequence of residential conversion of TPZ.

Both OWTS and sediment inputs from the use of residential dirt roads have been identified by the Trinidad and Westhaven Integrated Coastal Watershed Management Plan as priority issues in need of solutions because they are the principal pollution sources to the Trinidad Area of Special Biological Significance. Due to a lack of regulatory oversight, rectifying the water quality impacts from OWTS and sediment-delivery from private roads and driveways of dispersed rural residences is a difficult problem to rectify.

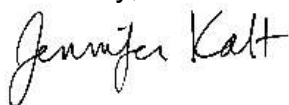
DFG recommendations include:

- 8) Require proof of adequate water supply and summer storage capacity in all watersheds if riparian and other water rights are to be utilized to divert water from streams for domestic and agricultural purposes.
- 9) Where residences or structures are approved on TPZ, require a means to ensure that forest roads and driveways are constructed and maintained to prevent sediment discharge to streams.

Without adopting policies, standards, and implementation measures to address and minimize or mitigate these ongoing impacts, salmon and steelhead as well as other protected species and their habitats will continue to decline. The County's outdated Framework Plan was adopted prior to the listing of coho, steelhead, and other aquatic species, and prior to the EPA listing of most of our streams and rivers as Impaired under the Clean Water Act. We look forward to working with you to ensure that development approved under the County's updated General Plan will not further contribute to impacts to these important resources.

Thank you for your careful consideration of these policies.

Sincerely,



Jen Kalt  
Healthy Humboldt Coalition

cc  
Humboldt County Planning Staff