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SUPES APPROVE LAND TRUST FUNDS

by Nathan Rushton, 1/17/2007

In a short-but-sweet meeting of the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors Tuesday, the board voted 5-0 to approve four separate \$10,000 funding requests by the nonprofit Northcoast Regional Land Trust to cover setup costs for securing nearly 20,000 acres for conservation easements.

The \$40,000 would not impact the county's general fund, rather it would be paid from a pool of federal Title III funding under the county's control, which can be used for appraisal costs, legal and recording fees, preparation and planning costs and easement purchases for non-county-initiated projects.

NRLT will use the funding to begin the process to secure a 7,276-acre conservation easement for the Bridgeville-area Chalk Mountain Ranch, an 8,222-acre easement for the Bridgeville-area Charles Mountain Ranch, a 2,205-acre easement for the Petrolia-area North Fork Ranch and a 1,470-acre easement for the Petrolia-area Valley View Ranch.

While Planning Department staff described the allocations as "a good fit" with the county's easement program goals, 5th District Supervisor Jill Geist raised concerns that it was imperative that the county, as part of the General Plan update process, look toward a coordinated and long-term planning approach in dealing with conservation easements.

"That is something I want to see us do because it puts us more firmly in the driver's seat in terms of being able to prioritize the various conservation easements or property acquisitions," Geist said.

Ann King Smith, an NRLT board of director's member, told the board that an upcoming conference in the summer aimed to discuss many of the concerns raised.

NRLT Project Manager Erik Wilson said the conference scheduled for June 15 and 16 will explore and attempt to gauge the interest for a regional association of the approximately 25 land trust groups in the region.

One of six regions delineated by the California Council of Land Trusts, Wilson said the northern region comprised of Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Trinity, Del Norte, Siskiyou and parts of Shasta and Modoc counties, is the last to organize regionally.

In a rare event one supervisor commented she wished would happen more often, the board was treated to a hefty round of applause following the unanimous approval of a general plan zoning amendment that clears the way for the construction of a church in McKinleyville.

The zone was changed from commercial recreation to public facility.

Approximately 20 New Heart Community Church members and neighbors cheered the board's action, which also cements an easement deal with the county to allow the Arcata to McKinleyville Hammond Trail to pass through the eastern portion of the 4 1/2-acre property.

Also tackled during a brief afternoon session, the board corrected a budget-related oversight in the Auditor-Controller's Office, which finalized the adoption of the 2006-07 budgets for 13 lesser-known flood control, lighting maintenance and storm drain districts governed by the county.

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