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Planning Division  
Humboldt County Community Development Services Department  
Clark Complex  
3015 H Street  
Eureka, CA 95501-4484

Dear Planning Division:

I writing this letter in regard to the General Plan Update and related matters on behalf of myself and the "Restoration Leadership Project." Rather than focusing on the myriad details involved in the complex and seemingly unending process of the General Plan Update and critical related issues, I am going to try and outline some overarching principles and actions that could make the General Plan a success with broad public support. Some more detailed actions will be referenced.

The perspective I bring to this process stems from the experience of a young bright-eyed couple moving to the Painter Creek watershed in the Mattole Valley in 1971, through the subsequent raising of a family, and the related trials and tribulations of homesteading, of a watershed restoration vocation, and a dedication to the recovery of damaged forests and fisheries habitat. My own particular experience has evolved into trying to find common ground whereby the range of interests of the various so-called stakeholders can coalesce into a economically and socially viable future in harmony with the lands, waters, and wildlife. In venues such as CalFire's Forest Stewardship Working Group, in the recent past, and in the current Buckeye Conservancy's Forest Project Group and in the respective Forest Futures Projects of the Mattole Restoration Council (MattoleRC) and the Institute for Sustainable Forestry (ISF), many persons of many persuasions continue to work hard to achieve 'relief and incentives' for non-industrial landowners to maintain resource lands in resource conservation and productivity.

In order for people to work together toward those ends, they must be secure in their dwellings and lands and willing to take responsibility for future generations. The county needs to facilitate such well-being and responsibility. County actions should not be intimidating to persons and families that do not pose an actual threat to health and safety. County actions should encourage responsibility and innovation, such as the Sanctuary Forest Mattole Flow Program, and not be an impediment.

I think the county needs to examine the history of the last 30 years or so, learn from it, and enable a current clean slate (see the 1982 Mendocino County ordinance) so that homeowners will be secure and that only the real problems to health and safety will be addressed. A crucial factor in attaining a good health and safety starting point would be having qualified third-party consultants carry out inspections and certifications.

It is with those kinds of approaches in mind, that I drafted "restoration zoning" language twice in the last three years. That language is attached.

Some of the more detailed language that complements and/or would help define "restoration zoning" or "restoration initiative areas" has been submitted under the auspices of Trees Foundation and others. The basic concept is that areas that have already been 'settled', and have associations of landowners that can agree to implement a certain number of precepts such as fuel hazard reduction, road improvements, erosion control, watershed & forest restoration activities, and certain alternative low-impact technologies would be eligible for some kind of relief or incentives from the county. One kind of assistance the county could offer is fundraising for implementation of restoration activities.

Lastly, a sane approach to conservation of productive forest and agriculture lands needs to be attained. The chances of this happening are greatly increased if such programs as described above are implemented. ISF and the Humboldt Watershed Council (HWC) have both submitted various proposals that could enable keeping the most valuable resource lands in productivity in perpetuity, while respecting private property rights and having development directed in the least damaging direction.

Positive visions for the future need to be emphasized rather than punitive threats and fear provoking actions. In order to work on common goals of personal and public benefit, the county needs to support domestic security, health & safety -- while facilitating a strong, healthy, and economic conservation relationship with the natural resources that support us.

Sincerely,

Richard Gienger