



MARIN COUNTY
PARKS
PRESERVATION • RECREATION



Linda Dahl
DIRECTOR
GENERAL MANAGER

May 20, 2014

Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, California 94903

SUBJECT: REQUEST TO AUTHORIZE PRESIDENT TO EXECUTE A GRANT AGREEMENT WITH THE MARIN AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST IN THE AMOUNT OF \$537,000 FOR THE ACQUISITION OF AN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION AGREEMENT ON THE THACHER RANCH, TOMALES

Dear Board Members,

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Authorize President to execute the agreement.
2. Authorize the Board of Supervisors to allocate \$537,000 within the Measure A Farmland Preservation Grant Program from Reserve for Acquisition to Pass-through Grantee.

SUMMARY:

Marin County Parks has received its first request for funds from the Measure A Farmland Preservation Program. The Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) requests a grant of \$537,000 to help acquire a perpetual agricultural conservation easement over the 623-acre Thacher Ranch, Assessor's Parcel 104-060-01. This single parcel of land in west Marin is approximately four miles south-east of the town of Tomales, and has been owned and operated by the Thacher family since 1954. It is used for commercial agricultural purposes, and supports both sheep and a grass-fed Angus beef operation. Details of the parcel's agricultural values are contained in the attachments.

The estimated fair market value of the easement is approximately \$1.8 million. Matching funds for the remaining cost of the easement have been secured by MALT from the federal Natural Resource Conservation Service Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (\$520,000), a One Bay Area Program grant (\$250,000), and MALT Private Funds (\$500,000). Income from the sale of this easement would alleviate the family's pressure to subdivide or otherwise liquidate some of the equity in its land to generate the funds necessary to diversify and continue agricultural uses.

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The property is adjacent to the MALT-protected Thorton Ranch. When protected, the property would join a contiguous block of 19 MALT-protected properties that almost entirely surround the town of Tomales, forming an agricultural greenbelt.

Ranch properties in West Marin face a very high risk of conversion to exclusive residential development, increasing building density, road construction, and other activities that threaten agriculture, natural resource values, and a way of life. Properties such as the Thacher Ranch are threatened as the market for luxury homes and estates steadily increases. Evidence of this threat comes from the 2009 sale of an 850-acre ranch 30 minutes south of the property to a San Francisco-based real estate investment company. There is a pending sale of that property as three separate parcels for \$2.5 million each. Once these agricultural properties are sold for non-agricultural use, they will likely never be available to commercial agriculture again.

Staff considers grant applications on a first-come first-served basis and evaluates the merits of each proposal based the project selection guidelines contained in the Marin County Agricultural Land Conservation Program, approved by the Board of Supervisors on January 31.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Sufficient budget capacity exists in the FY2013-14 Measure A Farmland Preservation Grant Program budget, Fund 24590, Acquisition Account 900005 for movement to 5410901. The Measure A Farmland Preservation Grant Program receipts to date (20% of Measure A annual revenues) are approximately \$1.9 million.

REVIEWED BY:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Department of Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> County Counsel	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Open Space Planner Craig Richardson is the principal author of this report.

Respectfully submitted


Ronald Miska
Deputy Director

RM/CR/kbl

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