

MARIN COUNTY PARKS

Preservation • Recreation

MARIN COUNTY
P A R K S
PRESERVATION RECREATION



OPEN SPACE DISTRICT
REGIONAL PARKS & PATHWAYS
COMMUNITY PARKS
LANDSCAPE SERVICES

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June 4, 2019

Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

SUBJECT: REQUEST TO APPROVE AND AUTHORIZE PRESIDENT TO EXECUTE AGREEMENT GRANTING MARIN AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST \$1,516,000 IN MEASURE A FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM FUNDS FOR PURCHASE OF AN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT OVER IELMORINI RANCH

Dear Board Members:

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Approve and authorize President to execute grant agreement for APNs 121-060-01 and 121-060-02.
2. Authorize the Director of Finance to approve budget adjustments as detailed in the fiscal impact section below.

SUMMARY:

Marin County Parks has received an application from Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) requesting \$1,516,000 in Measure A Farmland Preservation Program funds to purchase an agricultural conservation easement over the 758-acre Ielmorini ranch located northeast of Nicasio. The Ielmorini ranch would join a large swath of permanently protected ranches encompassing approximately 29,296 acres stretching from Chileno Valley to San Geronimo Valley.

The Ielmorini Back Ranch is a productive 758-acre agricultural property in the hills between Nicasio and Novato. About half the ranch is currently well suited for grazing. With improved water distribution, cross-fencing and additional conservation practices, the potential for increased productivity exists. There are five natural developed springs and tank to trough combinations, a small stock pond, corrals, perimeter fencing, and a single cross fence dividing the ranch in two primary pastures.

This ranch has been owned by a consortium of wealthy recreationists for several years. Doug Ielmorini leased the pastures starting in 1998 before buying a partial interest in the land in the early 2000s. The Ielmorinis made several attempts to buy out the other owners before finally resorting to a partition action. The Ielmorinis purchased the ranch out of the partition action with a sizeable bridge loan and mortgage from American Ag. Credit. With the falling price of organic milk, the Ielmorinis will not be able to afford to continue to make the high bridge loan payments without the help of a MALT easement sale. If MALT cannot secure the

funding to buy the easement on time, the lelmorinis may have to sell the ranch, and it could end up converted to a private park or estate.

Their ranch is considered "highly suitable" for conservation by the Bay Area Open Space Council's Conservation Lands Network, and about half the property is included in a critical wildlife habitat corridor linking the hills above the San Geronimo Valley to inland Sonoma County and Mt. Saint Helena. The property contains habitat suitable for several special-status species including the northern spotted owl, California red-legged frog, foothill yellow-legged frog and the western pond turtle.

Permanently preserving this ranch for agricultural uses will help to maintain the critical mass of farms necessary to sustain the required agricultural infrastructure to keep farming and ranching a viable component of the county's economy.

Staff considers grant applications for funding from the Measure A Farmland Preservation Program on a first-come first-served basis and evaluates the merits of proposals based on criteria contained in the Marin County Agricultural Land Conservation Program. The creation of this program was authorized by your board on January 31, 2012. Additionally, as approved by Marin voters in 2012, twenty percent of Measure A funds are mandated to be used for the protection of Marin County farmland at risk of subdivision and development in order to preserve Marin's working farms and ranches.

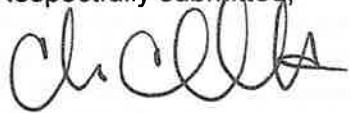
FISCAL IMPACT:

There will be no increase to General Fund Net County Cost as a result of your board's action. If approved, expenditure appropriations within Measure A, Fund 2560, Farmland Preservation Grant Program, will be increased by \$1,516,000 and fully offset by a corresponding reduction to the Measure A Farmland Preservation Program (2560-320525).

REVIEWED BY:

- Dept. of Finance N/A
- County Counsel N/A
- Human Resources N/A

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

Respectfully submitted,


Chris Chamberlain
Assistant Director

Munis Budget Journal Nbr 1544
Munis Contract 31901677