

BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION RANGE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Board of Forestry and Fire Protection – Range Management Advisory Committee

RANGELANDS FOCUS GROUP

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting held Monday, January 4, 2010
Resources Building, 1416 9th Street, 15th floor, Room 1504
Sacramento, California

Attending:

RMAC:

Bart T. Cremers
Scott Carnegie
Leonard Hale
Mel Thompson
Ken Zimmerman
Marc Horney

Representing:

California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF)
California Forestry Association (CFA)
Watershed Council of Southern California (WCSC)
California Wool Growers Association (CWG)
California Cattlemen's Association (CCA)
General Public

Eric Huff (staff)

California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection

Members of the Public:

John Gamper
Dawn Clover

Representing:

California Farm Bureau Federation
California Cattlemen's Association (CCA)

Item 1: Call to Order and Introductions

Following introductions of meeting participants, Rangelands Focus Group Acting Chairman, Bart Cremers called the meeting to order.

Item 2: Continued Discussion of Williamson Act Program Status.

Acting Chairman Cremers introduced the topic and summarized discussion points from the November focus group meeting. He then invited Mr. John Gamper of the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF) to provide CFBF's perspective on the issue and update the Group as to the status of the program.

Mr. Gamper reported that a recent meeting between local government representatives and the Governor's office had not resulted in favorable change to the status of the subvention funding program. The Governor has indicated that the program will not be funded once again in the 2010-2011 fiscal year. Mr. Gamper noted that the program's status will therefore be debated once again as the next fiscal year's budget proposals are brought forward.

As a result of the current and projected cuts to the program, CFBF presumes that local governments will begin notifying Williamson Act participants of their intention to not renew existing contracts under the Act. Mr. Gamper noted that Fresno County, the second largest Williamson Act County, has already signaled that it will not renew every contract.

Mr. Gamper went on to discuss possible alternatives for funding the program including an increase in property taxation. He also noted that Tulare County representatives had discussed the notion of a tax on gross production of agricultural operations, but that this proposal had failed for lack of support. He also noted that there may be some possibility of federal funding assistance to offset the lack of state funding in the current fiscal year. As to the question of prospective impacts to Williamson Act landowners, Mr. Gamper concluded that such impacts will vary by county and agricultural uses.

The Group Members questioned whether or not the program was not funded due to lack of support from environmental and political partisan groups. Mr. Gamper responded that the program is well supported by such groups and that this situation appears to have arisen solely as a result of the Governor's desire to use the program as a bargaining tool in state budget negotiations. In all likelihood, it will continue to be utilized in this fashion despite the impacts to rural communities throughout the state. Mr. Gamper concluded his report with a request for RMAC's continued support for the Williamson Act Program.

The Group discussed possible options including the use of voluntary conservation easements and environmental monitoring to help build support for program funding. Discussion concluded with the identification of the following key questions:

Key Questions:

- Will farmers and ranchers be forced out of business as a result of the loss of Williamson Act subvention funds?
- Will the loss of funds lead to increased rates of land conversion to non-agricultural uses?
- Will the loss of funds lead to further preservation-oriented land acquisitions by non-governmental organizations?

The Group suggested that next steps in discussion of this issue could include the development of factual findings in response to the key questions identified above. Acting Chairman Cremers noted that he would speak to Group Chairman, Charles Pritchard in advance of the next meeting to discuss his perspective on a prospective course of action.

Item 3: New and Unfinished Business.

Acting Chairman Cremers presented a draft list of Rangelands Focus Group Priorities for 2010 and solicited comments from the Membership. These draft priorities will be revised and finalized as the Group's and full Membership's perspectives are incorporated.

Item 4: Public Comment.

There was no public comment to report.

The meeting was then adjourned by unanimous consent of the Focus Group participants.

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