

BOLINAS COMMUNITY PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT

BCPUD BOX 390 270 ELM ROAD BOLINAS CALIFORNIA 94924 415 868 1224



October 30, 2014

VIA E-MAIL:

Laura Petro
Senior Environmental Scientist
California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N Street
Suite 221
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: Comments on the Statewide Plant Pest Prevention and Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Report

Dear Ms. Petro:

We are writing on behalf of the Bolinas Community Public Utility District (“BCPUD”), a political subdivision of the State of California. The BCPUD’s publicly elected Board of Directors approved this comment letter in opposition to the Statewide Plant Pest Preventing and Management Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (“PEIR”) at a duly noticed special meeting of the BCPUD Board on October 30, 2014. As detailed below in this letter, the BCPUD and the community it serves could be directly and adversely impacted in significant ways by the program proposed in PEIR. We also believe that the PEIR is unacceptable because of the broad mandate it would provide to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) for chemical pesticide use without further opportunity for environmental review in specific settings.

1. Contamination of Our Public Water Supply.

The BCPUD obtains all of the water it supplies to its customers from local surface water sources. It is unacceptable to us that the watersheds supplying this water ever be sprayed with toxic chemicals because there is no way to ensure that such chemicals would not enter the BCPUD’s water sources. Specifically, spray-drift could cause such chemicals to directly enter our primary water source, the Arroyo Hondo Creek, as well as our two surface water reservoirs, Woodrat1 and Woodrat 2. In addition, chemicals deposited anywhere within our watersheds could be washed into our creek and reservoirs by rain and, with regard to the creek, also by fog-drip from the creek watershed’s dense conifer forest cover. Any attempt to time the spraying to avoid rain would be an insufficient safeguard since weather predictions are notoriously unreliable. Summer fog is even less predictable and is very common in our coastal location backed by mountains. Indeed, we regularly observe an appreciable rise in the flow in the Arroyo Hondo Creek due to fog-drip in the middle of dry season, even when it has not rained for months beforehand. To protect the quality of our water sources, the BCPUD does not allow the use of any chemical pesticides on lands which it owns and we strongly oppose the use of chemical pesticides on our lands, as well as the lands surrounding our watersheds, by any public or private entity.

2. Threat to Our Community's Farmers.

Organic farming is a mainstay of the Bolinas economy and the economies of many coastal Marin County communities. Due to the intensive requirements of organic farming, Bolinas farmers are struggling to survive, even with the premium prices paid for organic produce. The CDFA's PEIR acknowledges that the proposed program would be economically harmful to organic farming because of "unintended pesticide residues and/or plant damage that could jeopardize organic certification for USDA Organic-certified growers, or more likely, affect their ability to market their product as organic", and that conversion of organic to conventional farming could result. In fact, we believe the impact of the program likely would ruin organic farms, because conventional farming would not be economically sustainable here, given the small acreage and high costs of operation.

Chemical pesticides are ruinous not only to organic crops directly, but also to the pollinators and other beneficial insects that are an integral part of an organic farm. It is grossly insufficient for the CDFA to settle for mitigating the acknowledged harm to these insects by proposing other programs to help them. It also is specious for the PEIR to dismiss the ongoing widespread pollinator decline by saying that "the acreage of pollinator-dependent crops has continued to increase in the state".

3. Public health concerns.

In addition to the potential contamination of drinking water supplies, chemical pesticide use such as that contemplated in the PEIR poses potentially significant public health hazards that have been documented extensively in the scientific literature. Our comments in this letter are focused on the impacts to drinking water sources and surrounding watersheds/local businesses, but we respectfully submit that the documented public health hazards of such chemical pesticide use outweigh any potential benefits.

4. Potential impacts on environmentally protected areas.

Coastal Marin is home to numerous areas of environmental significance. Among the protected areas in Bolinas are the Bolinas Lagoon, a wetland of international importance, and Duxbury Reef, which is an Area of Special Biological Significance ("ASBS" under California's Ocean Plan) and part of a national marine sanctuary. The issue of potential pesticide (and also herbicide) runoff onto Duxbury Reef already has been addressed by relevant supervisory agencies. The following is an excerpt from Section 5.1.6 of the Draft Duxbury Reef ASBS Compliance Plan:

On the November 2005 ballot 86 percent of the Bolinas voters approved Measure E which endorsed the BCPUD efforts to negotiate a non-toxic protocol with the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District (MSMVCD). The BCPUD and the MSMVCD signed a written agreement which provides that only mechanical and bacteriological means of mosquito control will be employed in West Marin; the only exception is if the MSMVCD, in conjunction with the Marin County Public Health Officer and California Department of Health Services – Vector Borne Disease Section, declares a state of emergency based on response levels as outlined in the Arbovirus Surveillance Response Plan.

In our view, this approach is the proper one for the use of toxic chemical pesticides: specifically, such pesticides should be prohibited unless a state of emergency has been declared in conjunction with public health officials. Please note that no such state of emergency has ever been declared in Bolinas and that mosquito and vector control management has been accomplished without the use of chemical pesticides.

5. Unacceptable mandate for pesticide use by CDFA.

The proposed PEIR would allow the CDFA to avoid almost all subsequent environmental review and public scrutiny for its plant pest programs, which is unacceptable and poor public policy, as well.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Overall, we believe the CDFA's proposed program as set forth in the PEIR is a step backwards in its approach to pest management. The coastal areas of Marin County long ago left behind the type of chemical-based approach to pest management envisioned in the PEIR. As noted above with regard to Bolinas, the non-toxic approach to pest control received 86% voter approval in Bolinas in 2005; we believe that the voter approval percentage would be even higher today.

It has been decades since the first warnings of the dangers of chemical pesticides were made public. We therefore are surprised that the CDFA does not acknowledge that society's long experience with the use of chemical pesticides repeatedly has shown them to be more harmful than expected for both ecosystem diversity and human health, while only temporarily diminishing the target pest and rarely eradicating it (except locally).

Non-toxic physical and biological approaches are more selective to the target pest and disrupt the ecosystem either shorter-term or not at all. We believe such approaches are the way of the future and where CDFA should focus its efforts and the taxpayers' money. These approaches offer environmentally appropriate pest management, whereas chemical pesticides do not. And these approaches are consistent with California's increasingly important (and profitable) organic farming movement that may someday provide the template for how farming must be done if it is to be sustainable generations into the future.

We believe that California should lead the way in the crucial work of learning to live with nature, and we strongly urge the CDFA to rethink the entire program set forth in the PIER. Indeed, the PEIR already acknowledges that "the USDA Organic Pesticide Alternative is considered to be environmentally superior." We urge the CDFA to serve the people of California by rejecting the proposed program and instead pursuing in earnest the USDA Organic Pesticide Alternative.

On behalf of the BCPUD Board of Directors,



Don Smith
Member, Board of Directors



Lyndon Comstock
Member, Board of Directors