

EXHIBIT 2: Letters of Support



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September 15, 2003

Kate Goodnight
Coastal Conservancy
1330 Broadway, #100
Oakland, CA 94612-2530

RE: Support letter for Sustainable Conservation's *Permit Coordination Program for Santa Cruz County*

Dear Kate:

I am writing to encourage the Coastal Conservancy to support ongoing funding to Sustainable Conservation to implement regulatory coordination in Santa Cruz County. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided \$36,000 in start up funding for this program and we are pleased with the results accomplished to date. The challenges of obtaining county-wide pre-conditioned approval for conservation activities are significant in the county but the competent staff at Sustainable Conservation has made significant progress in obtaining agency support.

The proposal to the California Coastal Conservancy will provide Sustainable Conservation with funding to complete the later phases of the permit coordination program in partnership with NRCS and the Santa Cruz Resource Conservation District. Permit Coordination has been identified by agencies and agricultural groups as a critical step to increase landowner investment in conservation practices to prevent soil erosion and associated water quality problems. The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's *Action Plan IV: Agriculture and Rural Lands* specifically identifies improvement of the regulatory review process as an essential step in changing land management to protect water quality in the bay. Several local watershed management plans developed by the Santa Cruz Resource Conservation District have pointed to the need for improved regulatory review of agricultural and riparian enhancement projects.

Sustainable Conservation is the non-profit environmental organization that partnered with NRCS to develop the permit coordination program in the Elkhorn Slough Watershed in 1997 and has continued to assist NRCS and RCDs to initiate programs in six other coastal watersheds. The program has been shown to increase the number of NRCS or RCD designed soil conservation projects that get fully implemented. The program also increases NRCS and RCD knowledge of regulatory agency requirements and improves the design of projects to address multiple resource considerations.

During the first phase of developing the Santa Cruz Permit Coordination Program, we determined that the permit coordination program approach is acceptable to the agencies. Sustainable Conservation has initiated formal negotiations for programmatic approval of specified NRCS/RCD conservation practices. This continuing work will be conducted under the grant from the California Coastal Conservancy.

I am confident that the Sustainable Conservation program will provide needed regulatory relief for NRCS and RCD cooperators in Santa Cruz County and will accelerate the implementation of conservation practices to prevent soil erosion, improve sensitive habitat, and protect water quality. NRCS, as a lead agency for conservation, believes that the benefits of the Sustainable Conservation program will also increase cooperation between federal, state, and local agencies to provide coordinated guidance and regulatory review of conservation projects.

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We encourage the Coastal Conservancy to work with NRCS to provide the matching financial support to complete the Santa Cruz County Permit Coordination Program. Our combined efforts will strengthen collaboration between local, state, and federal regulatory agencies and the NRCS/RCD field office staff to provide landowners and managers with conservation practices that are consistent with resource protection laws and regulations.

Sincerely,



Carter D. Christenson
Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

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