

# California State Senate

SENATOR  
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FIFTEENTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT  
CHAIRMAN  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY



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AND STATE LEGISLATION  
SCHOOL SAFETY  
TECHNOLOGICAL CRIME  
AND THE CONSUMER

November 12, 2004

Doug Bosco, Chair  
State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Chairman Bosco:

I am writing to convey my strong support for American Land Conservancy's project to acquire the Piedras Blancas Motel property in San Luis Obispo County for public benefit. This property is the last unprotected private in-holding west of Highway One along the 18-mile coastline of the Hearst Ranch.

This acquisition is an incredible opportunity to complete the protection of the entire Hearst Ranch coastline. When the Hearst Ranch conservation project is completed, the 20-acre motel property will be the only property not protected from further development. Given that significant coverage rights exist and are underutilized, there is a significant risk that the landowner will sell the property to a developer who will expand the motel facilities on the property. Moreover, the motel does not allow public access to the two sandy beaches along the property, making these beaches an exception along the 18-mile coastline of the Hearst Ranch. Finally, at several points along the coast, the property is under heavy erosion pressure. Acquisition of the property will avoid future shoreline armoring to protect existing structures and will allow for appropriate re-use of structures not threatened by erosion for public use.

If acquired, much of the existing development can be removed, thereby permitting restoration of natural habitat and the scenic enhancement of this gorgeous stretch of California's central coast. Your action to help acquire this important property will safeguard the \$95,000,000 state and federal investment in the protection of the Hearst Ranch and enhance public access in the area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce McPherson".

Senator Bruce McPherson

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, Room 370 • SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA 93408-2040 • 805.781.5450

November 30, 2004

SHIRLEY BIANCHI  
SUPERVISOR DISTRICT TWO

Doug Bosco, Chair  
State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: Piedras Blancas Motel Acquisition

Dear Chairman Bosco and Honorable Board Members:

I am writing to convey my strong support for American Land Conservancy's project to acquire the Piedras Blancas Motel property in San Luis Obispo County for public benefit. This property is the last unprotected private in-holding west of Highway One along the 18-mile coastline of the Hearst Ranch.

This acquisition is an incredible opportunity to complete the protection of the entire Hearst Ranch coastline. When the Hearst Ranch conservation project is completed, the 20-acre motel property will be the only property not protected from further development. Given that significant coverage rights exist and are underutilized, there is a significant risk that the landowner will sell the property to a developer who will expand the motel facilities on the property. Moreover, the motel does not allow public access to the two sandy beaches along the property, making these beaches an exception along the 18-mile coastline of the Hearst Ranch. Finally, at several points along the coast, the property is under heavy erosion pressure. Acquisition of the property will avoid future shoreline armoring to protect existing structures and will allow for appropriate re-use of structures not threatened by erosion for public use.

If acquired, much of the existing development can be removed, thereby permitting restoration of natural habitat and the scenic enhancement of this gorgeous stretch of California's central coast. Your action to help acquire this important property will safeguard the \$95,000,000 state and federal investment in the protection of the Hearst Ranch and enhance public access in the area.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

SHIRLEY BIANCHI  
Supervisor, District Two

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**COASTAL CONSERVANCY  
OAKLAND, CALIF.**



SIERRA  
CLUB  
FOUNDED 1892

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San Luis Obispo, CA 93406  
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November 30, 2004

Doug Bosco, Chair  
State Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: Piedras Blancas Motel Acquisition

Dear Chairman Bosco and Honorable Board Members:

The Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports the acquisition and restoration of the Piedras Blancas Motel property in San Luis Obispo County for the benefit of the public and the protection of public-trust resources.

The grant of state funds to the American Land Conservancy's project to acquire this property should be conditioned as follows:

- No future shoreline armoring permitted
- Public access allowed to the two sandy beaches along the property
- The majority of the existing development (coffee shop, gas station) to be removed; motel to be retained for low-cost overnight visitor serving use until such time as shoreline erosion makes it untenable, at which time it shall be removed and the site restored to its natural conditions
- Passive recreation only, considering sensitive terrestrial habitat.

Please take these actions in order to allow for the appropriate adaptation to public use of structures not threatened by erosion, the restoration of natural habitat and the protection of California's central coast.

Sincerely Yours,

Tarren Collins, Chair  
Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club

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OAKLAND, CALIF.

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

CENTRAL COAST DISTRICT OFFICE  
725 FRONT STREET, SUITE 300  
SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060  
PHONE: (831) 427-4863  
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December 1, 2004

California Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, 11th Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

Subject: **Letter of Support--Piedras Blancas Resort Acquisition Project (Agenda Item #17)**

Dear Chairman Bosco and Members of the Board:

The purpose of this letter is to express our support for the subject Piedras Blancas Resort Acquisition Project, listed on the agenda for your meeting of December 2, 2004. The project has great potential to both enhance and protect the significant scenic resources of the North Coast of San Luis Obispo, and provide increased public access to this tremendous stretch of coast.

One of California's greatest treasures is the scenic corridor along the north coast of San Luis Obispo County. Here, the shoreline drive on State Highway Route 1 unfolds a particularly appealing succession of rocky shorelines, undeveloped beaches, headlands, lagoons, offshore rocks, wide open coastal terrace grasslands and distant vistas to the Big Sur Coast, looming ahead. For a distance of more than 13 miles, the seaward vista is virtually free of substantial manmade structures; public views are punctuated only by the existing structures on the project site and at the nearby Piedras Blancas Lighthouse Reservation (now managed by BLM).

The special value of this corridor is recognized through designation as a State Scenic Highway, as a National Scenic Byway, and by the certified San Luis Obispo County Local Coastal Program (LCP) as a highly scenic area. The highway vista points immediately south of Piedras Blancas Point are the only place where visitors can drive right up to seasonal breeding colonies of the Northern elephant seal—an extraordinary, primordial spectacle and a key opportunity for visitors to learn about the adjacent ocean waters within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. And, the gentle coastal terrace seaward of the highway provides the obvious and ideal alignment for the California Coastal Trail.

**Acquisition: what does the LCP provide?** The LCP's North Coast Area Plan (NCAP) highlights a combining designation program for the *Public Acquisition of Piedras Blancas Point*. It states: "The State Dept. of Parks and Recreation or other appropriate agency should acquire the Piedras Blancas Point and Lighthouse for public access. The state should investigate the development of a small-scale hostel using the existing buildings. Improvements should include: a) A small parking area adjacent to the southern cove; b) Interpretive signs and coastal access signs on Highway." (NCAP p. 7-4)

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has in fact acquired the former Lighthouse Reservation on Piedras Blancas Point, and is actively pursuing plans to restore the historic lighthouse and provide for some level of public visitation. However, we understand that certain on-site limitations may have been discovered, and access rights across intervening Hearst property have yet to be fully clarified. While the LCP is silent regarding acquisition of the nearby Piedras Blancas Motel (Resort) property, it is apparent that the project site has potential usefulness as a staging area and as a site for other visitor support functions that may not be feasibly provided at the lighthouse itself.

For example, the southwest corner of the site—an area that appears to be comprised of more resistant coastal bluff materials--borders the very delightful Arroyo del Corral Beach and has a direct connection to the highway, i.e., no intervening Hearst land. The seabird colony on the odd islet named Harlech Castle Rock is seen directly offshore. Existing Monterey cypress trees could provide a measure of visual screening at this exposed site. Therefore, this could potentially be a highly desirable location for interpretation, CCT/Lighthouse tour staging, hostel, environmental camping and other recreational support purposes over the long run. If these uses prove to be feasible, this would provide options for implementing or supplementing the LCP's vision for Piedras Blancas.

**Regulatory considerations and limitations.** The LCP provides significant protection for coastal resources at this site. For example, the NCAP specifies a height limit of 15 feet for new additions on this property. The SLO County LCP also requires that new development in this area be sited to minimize its visibility from public view corridors, such as Highway 1, and that structures be designed to be subordinate to, and blend with, the rural character of the area. But, it also allows up to a 40% of the site to be developed. Of course, this is a maximum allowance and any new development on the site would necessarily be evaluated against the high visual resource protection standards of the LCP. Both commercial visitor serving and residential development are potentially allowable. Preservation of scenic values through acquisition would therefore represent the preferred alternate scenario.

Any preservation project should also be designed to clearly allow for necessary and appropriate public access support facilities such as restrooms, interpretation, etc., needed to make the scenic setting available for public use and enjoyment. Of course, the amount and location of future uses will be constrained by the need to provide long-term setbacks from the rapidly eroding shoreline at the north end of the property. The Coastal Act does not support shoreline protection works for new development, and Caltrans will remove the existing rock revetment to the north of the existing motel when Highway 1 is realigned. Accordingly, acquisition for public use should be predicated on geotechnical investigation to determine how much, if any, of the property will remain over the long run, and whether planned retreat is an option.

Other important considerations that should be taken into account when acquisition is contemplated are the potential presence of environmentally sensitive plant habitats, the difficulty of handling larger effluent volumes in septic systems, and the question of water supply adequacy.

State Coastal Conservancy  
Piedras Blancas Acq. Project  
Dec. 1, 2004  
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These factors will influence both the location and potential intensity of any future use of the property, whether public or private.

**Conclusion.** We believe the public interest will be best served by permanently preserving and restoring the spectacular scenic qualities of this shoreline. Adverse commercial or residential development on the project site would greatly prejudice this desirable goal. Public ownership represents an opportunity to accomplish scenic restoration goals, to achieve permanent scenic resource protection, and to secure meaningful public access. Because the incentive to maximize development potential is removed, public stewardship can help to insure that access support facilities are provided in a way that is appropriately scaled and subordinate to the character of the landscape.

Accordingly, with the previously-stated qualifications in mind, we support the Piedras Blancas Resort Acquisition Project.

Sincerely,



Charles Lester  
Deputy Director  
California Coastal Commission

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OAKLAND, CALIF.