

MEMORANDUM

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

County of Placer

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

DATE: May 26, 2009

FROM: KEN GREHM

SUBJECT: SCILACCI FARMS AGRICULTURAL AND FLOOD CONTROL EASEMENT -
RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT AND APPROVING GRANT APPLICATION

ACTION REQUESTED / RECOMMENDATION

Approve a Resolution supporting the Ducks Unlimited's application to California Department of Conservation's Farmland Conservancy Program in an amount of \$549,900 to contribute to the purchase of a flood and agricultural easement on the Scilacci Farms property. The estimated total cost of the project is \$1,549,900 with the easement projected to be \$1,231,400 of this total.

BACKGROUND / SUMMARY

Scilacci Farms is owned solely by Kirk and Michelle Scilacci. The property is currently planted to rice, although the farm sometimes grows wheat and other small grains. The approximate acreage to be protected and utilized for flood protection will be 330 acres of rice agriculture. Kirk and Michelle Scilacci are willing sellers, and support the activities anticipated for the property.

The easement will protect both the agricultural and wildlife values of the property and provide flood retention benefits associated with the flooding of rice fields to protect downstream communities from winter flood flows. The PCFCWCD will develop a periodic winter flooding program on the property which will facilitate winter flood water storage by flooding the rice patties during extreme storm events. The retention of water could occur in as little as a 10-year flood event. This winter flood water detention is not expected to significantly impact the agricultural values on the farm since the rice farming occurs in the Spring and Summer. For this flood control benefit and the creation of flood retention credits within the cross canal watershed (particularly the Sunset Industrial area), the Redevelopment Agency is proposed to fund part of the project up to \$500,000. The Scilacci Farms flood and agricultural easement will provide an off-channel safety valve for water moving into populated areas downstream.

Purchasing of 330 acres of flood and conservation easements on this rice production land will compliment efforts on agricultural lands immediately to the east including a Department of Water Resources (DWR) protected site that also provides improved floodplain and riparian protection. These adjacent properties include the 138-acre Lakeview Farms Conservation project which was awarded a grant through the Flood Corridor Protection Program in 2004, as well as the Lakeview Farms NCRS easements that are part of a larger restoration effort.

Acquisition of flood and agricultural easements on Scilacci Farms will:

- Quickly and cost effectively, provide approximately 500 acre-feet of increased volumetric storage (retention) within the existing floodplain during a 100-year flood

event (Phase I). Provide approximately 800 acre-feet of retention during a 100-year flood event over the long term (Phase II).

- Provide approximately 250 acre-feet of flood retention credits to county projects within the Cross Canal watershed, most specifically in the Sunset Industrial area.
- Conserve 330 acres of agricultural land adjacent to Coon Creek in an area of increasing development pressure
- Preserve and maintain surrogate wetlands
- Preserve open space, providing linkages with surrounding preserve areas
- Benefit migratory birds and wildlife
- Maintain habitat and connectivity for state and federal species of concern (Central Valley Steelhead, Chinook Salmon, Swainson's Hawk, Northern Harrier, California Sandhill Crane, White-tailed Kite, Western Pond Turtle, and potentially Giant Garter Snake)
- Help secure balance of property -- 119 acres of riparian woodlands and adjacent wheat field -- for future habitat restoration under a separate grant program

The project is considered multi-objective in nature since in addition to flood control benefits, it will also preserve open space, surrogate wetlands, and maintain habitat values at the same time that agricultural practices are continued and protected. This project is being proposed as a collaborative effort between the PCFCWCD, Placer County Redevelopment Agency, Placer County (particularly through the Placer Legacy program) and Ducks Unlimited.

Placer Legacy, Placer County RCD, and Ducks Unlimited are all partners in the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture which has recently expanded its efforts into the area known as the American Basin. Within this basin, the American Basin Working Group has identified the lower Coon Creek drainage in western Placer County and eastern Sutter County as one of two high priority acquisition areas. Ducks Unlimited will be the holder of the easement title while the County will have rights to the flood easement. Ducks Unlimited is the second largest conservation organization in North America and has been active in the project area resolving natural resource conflicts and protecting the long-term viability of agriculture including other recent acquisitions in the area.

ENVIRONMENTAL

This action to support an application for funding is not a project, as defined in Section 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and is exempt from CEQA review. Implementation of a flood control project would eventually require environmental review in conformance with CEQA and the Placer County Environmental Review Ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACT

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$1,549,900 with the proposed funding as shown below:

California Farmland Conservancy Program	\$ 549,900
Ducks Unlimited Working Landscape Grant	\$ 300,000
Placer Legacy	\$ 200,000
Redevelopment Agency	<u>\$ 500,000</u>
	\$1,549,900

The cost of the easement is estimated to be \$1,231,400 which includes acquisition and due diligence. The project team is requesting \$549,900 from the California Farmland Conservancy Program. A \$1.7 million California Department of Fish & Game Working Landscape Grant was awarded to Placer Legacy, the Placer County RCD, and Ducks Unlimited to provide funding for wetland restoration, riparian restoration, agricultural preservation, and to facilitate agricultural infrastructure projects. Approximately \$300,000 of this grant will be utilized to purchase the flood and agricultural easement for the Scilacci Farms property. Placer Legacy Open Space Trust Fund is proposed to contribute \$200,000 due to the conservation benefits associated with the project. The Placer County Redevelopment Agency is proposed to contribute \$500,000 in exchange for future flood retention credits to be used in the Sunset Industrial Area.

Staff will return to the Board at a later date to appropriate the Open Space Funding if the project is awarded a Department of Conservation grant.

Before the Board of Supervisors County of Placer, State of California

In the matter of: RESOLUTION APPROVING
THE APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS TO
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATIONS' CALIFORNIA FARMLAND
CONSERVANCY PROGRAM FOR THE
SCILACCI FARMS CONTROLAND
AGRICULTURAL EASEMENT

Resol. No:.....

The following RESOLUTION was duly passed by the Board of Supervisors
of the County of Placer at a regular meeting held _____ 2009,
by the following vote on roll call:

Ayes:

Noes:

Absent:

Signed and approved by me after its passage.

Attest:
Clerk of said Board

F. C. Rockholm
Chairman, Board of Supervisors

Ann Holman

WHEREAS, the California State Legislature has established the California Farmland Conservancy Program within the Department of Conservation and through a grant program is providing assistance to conserve important agricultural land resources that are subject to conversion pressures; and

WHEREAS, the Placer County Board of Supervisors supports the efforts of Placer County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (PCFCWCD), Placer County Redevelopment Agency (RDA), Placer Legacy, and Ducks Unlimited, Inc., in conserving priority agricultural land resources;

WHEREAS, the Placer County Board of Supervisors support the Ducks Unlimited, Inc. Scilacci Farms grant application to the Conservation Easements for Agricultural Lands (CEAL) program through the California Farmland Conservancy Program (previously the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program); and

WHEREAS, the California Farmland Conservancy Program requires a resolution certifying that a specific easement proposal meets certain eligibility criteria; and

WHEREAS, PCFCWCD, RDA, Placer Legacy, and Ducks Unlimited, Inc., intend to use California Farmland Conservancy Program funds as part of the overall funding to purchase agricultural conservation easements on the Scilacci Farms, which is located within the CEAL program area; and

WHEREAS, the Placer County Board of Supervisors supports the easement and certifies that the easement meets eligibility criteria set forth in Public Resources Code Section 10251 as follows:

- 1. The parcels proposed for conservation are expected to continue to be used for, and are large enough to sustain, commercial agricultural production. The land is also in an area that possesses the necessary market, infrastructure, and agricultural support services, and the surrounding parcel sizes and land uses will support long-term commercial agricultural production;**
- 2. Placer County has a General Plan which demonstrates a long-term commitment to agricultural land conservation. This commitment is reflected in the goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures of the plan, including Placer Legacy, and relate to the area where the easement acquisition is proposed.**
- 3. The grant proposal is consistent with the Placer County General Plan.**

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Placer, State of California, that this Board approves the submission of a grant application for funding from the California Farmland Conservancy Program for the Scilacci Farms Agricultural and Flood Control Easement Project.



Figure 1: Site Plan of Scilacci Farms Flood and Conservation Easements