



**SIERRA
CLUB**

**SONOMA GROUP OF THE
REDWOOD CHAPTER**

P.O. Box 466
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

sierraclub.org/redwood/sonoma

February 9, 2024

To: Senator Mike McGuire
Senator Bill Dodd
Assemblymember Damon Connolly

Via Email

Re: Sonoma Developmental Center – Open Space Transfer and 100-acre Carve Out for CalFire and non-open space uses

Dear Senator McGuire, Senator Dodd and Assemblymember Connolly,

Sierra Club is excited that hundreds of acres of open space where bears and mountain lions roam are being transferred to adjacent state parks from the former Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) property in Glen Ellen in Sonoma Valley. It's a big win for statewide conservation as the 650 acres of undeveloped land will be designated under the Governor's plan to conserve 30 percent of CA lands by 2030.

The Sonoma Group of the Redwood Chapter has long been advocating for the SDC open transfer and designation under 30 X 30. We applaud you for listening to the community and championing open space protection.

While the 650 acre land transfer was very good news, Sierra Club is very concerned that the state held back 100 acres from the 750 acres total promised throughout the planning process without any public notice or consultation. After pressing for answers, the public was told via a statement from State Parks that the 100 acre carve out was for new and expanded CalFire facilities on the property, wildfire buffers and other non-open space use. Such uses were never discussed in any public forum and decided behind closed doors in Sacramento.

The 100 acres left out includes part of the Sonoma Valley Wildlife corridor that provides critical habitat linkage to wild lands that extend as far as the Berryessa-Snow Mountain Wilderness to the east; and Pt. Reyes National Seashore on the coast. Many questions remain about the boundaries and use of the missing 100 acres of open space.

It is our understanding that CalFire offices are to be built on what is presently, and was intended to remain, open space. This "carve-out" is out of conformance with both the SDC Specific Plan approved by Sonoma County in 2022 and with the legislation authorizing the SDC planning process, which specifies the general parameters of parcels to be developed (e.g., the 180-acre core campus) and parcels to be set aside as parkland in perpetuity (e.g. 750 acres of open space surrounding the campus). (Section 14670.10.5(a)(9): *"It is the intent of the Legislature that the lands outside the core developed campus and its related infrastructure be preserved as public parkland and open space."*)

In addition, we understand the carve-out that follows the route of a proposed road linking Arnold Drive to Highway 12 — a road that was only considered by Sonoma County as for emergency vehicle access (Figure 3-1, SDC Specific Plan), not as a link between development on the campus and development alongside the highway. This potential road would traverse wetlands and likely trigger delineation and mitigation under the Clean Water Act Section 404. How will this be addressed and how many potential acres of fill are being considered under the carve out?

Given these disappointing developments, and pulling from our intimate knowledge of the land and the planning process, we join our allies including Sonoma Mountain Preservation in seeking your assistance to immediately address the following questions and concerns:

- Why is the proposed CalFire complex located in open space rather than on the core campus, where 410,000 square feet of commercial development that has been designated within the SDC Specific Plan?
- Who authorized this carve-out?
- Why is CalFire building in an area that burned in the 2017 Nuns Fire and that the state's own Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps show boarder high and very high fire severity zones?
- What exactly is CalFire planning to build on this sensitive site?
- Will CalFire be abandoning its existing facilities along Highway 12 adjacent to Sonoma Valley Regional Park?
- Why was the community not informed of this drastic increase in development on the SDC property?
- Is it possible to rescind both the carve-outs for both CalFire the road and, instead, for CalFire and the California Department of General Services and/or DGS's chosen developer accommodate CalFire's needs on the developable campus.

An additional carve-out is identified on the map surrounding Camp Via within the boundaries of Jack London State Historic Park. To avoid being blindsided on potential development plans for that acreage and to ensure transparency, we request that those plans be disclosed immediately.

Finally, we request that before any further planning for the site takes place, boundaries for the new state parkland, inclusive of the CalFire carve-out, the roadway carve-out, and the Camp Via carve-out, be finalized and that the state hold public meetings for concerned stakeholders and specifically with Sierra Club.

Sierra Club remains opposed to the massive urban development in the heart of the open space on the historic SDC campus. We submitted extensive comments during the county's public panning process urging the supervisors to scale back the development on the historic campus. Instead both the county and that state are forwarding large sprawl developments in a greenbelt far from public transit, shops, schools and services in direct conflict with multiple state, regional and local land use policies and climate commitments.

We will continue to watchdog the SDC lands and fight for full protection of the wildlife corridor and scaling back urbanization on the historic campus.

Sincerely yours,

Shirley Johnson, Chair
Sonoma Group Executive Committee-Shirley Johnson (Chair), Tom Conlon, Theresa Ryan, Dan Mayhew,
Ellen Hathaway, Teri Shore

