



The Center for Biological Diversity’s Concerns with the Le Colline Vineyard

The Center for Biological Diversity has closely reviewed the environmental review documents for the proposed Le Colline Vineyard Erosion Control Plan and was disappointed by Napa County Planning Division’s decision March 24, 2023, to approve the project. The Center is dedicated to the protection of native species and their habitats through science, policy, and environmental law. We have worked for many years to protect imperiled plants and wildlife, open space, air and water quality, and overall quality of life for people in Napa County. The Center has numerous concerns with the proposed Project’s environmental harms and its inadequate Environmental Impact Report.

The Project will increase the risk and dangers from wildfire for the surrounding community.

The scientific evidence is clear that development in highly fire-prone areas increases unintentional ignitions and puts more people at risk from wildfire. Napa County’s fire history shows that small, isolated vineyards like the Project are vulnerable to wildfire and are not effective fire breaks. Any claim that the Project would reduce wildfire risk is contrary to science. Further, the Project increases fire risk at the same time that it increases traffic on Cold Springs Road—a small, rural street—and makes it harder for residents and vineyard employees to evacuate if there is a fire.

The environmental review underestimates the overall greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the Project and downplays the Project’s contribution to climate crisis. The EIR fails to consider all of the Project’s greenhouse gas emissions, including for example, the loss of carbon sequestration and resulting emissions from the removal of shrublands on the site. Further, the EIR claims to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through measures that are voluntary, vague, and not proven to reduce emissions. The Project lacks the necessary measures to achieve “Net Zero” carbon emissions. The climate crisis could not be more urgent, and the Project’s attempts to address it, including a dubious tree-planting program, amount to little more than greenwashing.

The Project will likely degrade the water quality of Conn Creek and reduce groundwater supply in region. The environmental review for the Project makes the incorrect and unsupported claim that converting natural forestland on steep slopes above Conn Creek to agricultural use will *improve* erosion, sedimentation, and runoff into the Creek. In fact, forest cover plays a critical role in regulating water flow, maintaining water quality, promoting groundwater recharge, and protecting overall watershed health. Without that forest cover, sediment and pesticide runoff from the vineyard will enter the Creek, which feeds Lake Hennessy and supplies drinking water to the City of Napa. Further, the Project will draw from an on-site well to irrigate almost 30 acres of vineyard when Napa County has extracted more groundwater than the basin can consistently support every year for the last three years. The current groundwater usage is unsustainable yet the county keeps approving more irrigated acres on a basin that is already overdrawn.

The Project will harm wildlife and habitat. The environmental review for the Project lacks necessary protection for wildlife habitat for foothill yellow-legged frogs, California giant salamanders, or coast range newts, among other sensitive species that are an important part of Napa County's rich biodiversity. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife submitted a letter explaining that the site is valuable habitat for foothill yellow-legged frogs and coast range newts. Nonetheless, the Project ignores the species that depend on the riparian and aquatic habitat along Conn Creek and its tributaries—habitats that will be degraded by the Project. The proposed vineyard will also remove oak woodland which provides irreplaceable ecosystem benefits like water quality protection, carbon sequestration, erosion control, and soil retention. Oak trees can take up to thirty years to reach full maturity, so losing many acres of them is a tremendous loss.

The Project will negatively impact the adjacent Linda Falls Preserve. Linda Falls Preserve, an approximately 175-acre preserve owned by the Land Trust of Napa County that includes trails, scenic views and a beautiful waterfall, is adjacent to the Project site. The environmental review documents state that the Project will not be visible from the Linda Falls Preserve. That is not true—the Preserve's main trail includes eastern views of the Project site. Linda Falls Preserve is an important recreational and natural resource for the community of Angwin.

For these reasons and others, the Center for Biological Diversity has filed an administrative appeal to the Napa County Board of Supervisors challenging approval of the Le Colline Vineyard. The Center will be appearing before the Board at hearing on August 15, 2023. If you have any questions or would like to know more about the Center's on-going administrative appeal against the Le Colline Vineyard, contact Frances Tinney (ftinney@biologicaldiveristy.org) or Aruna Prabhala (aprabhala@biologicaldiversity.org).