



# COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

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## Board of Supervisors

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June 06, 2017

Charlton H. Bonham, Director  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
1416 9<sup>th</sup> Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### **Subject: Potential Purchase of Shasta Big Springs Ranch**

Dear Director Bonham:

The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors is submitting this letter to express our concerns with the California Fish and Wildlife's (Fish and Wildlife) consideration of purchasing the Shasta Big Springs Ranch, located in the Shasta Valley of Siskiyou County. As you are aware, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) purchased the Shasta Big Springs Ranch in 2009, for \$14.2 million dollars, with the intent of managing the property for both fisheries restoration and agricultural production. In 2011, the Fish and Wildlife purchased the Shasta Big Springs Ranch water rights, through a conservation easement, for \$10.3 million dollars with the intent of dedicating the water for in-stream purposes.

Over the last year or so, Fish and Wildlife has been expressing their desire to purchase the Shasta Big Springs Ranch, which would remove it from private ownership and from the tax base for Siskiyou County. Siskiyou County has significant concerns regarding this potential purchase, and would like to express our concerns at this time. Although there have been multiple discussions between Fish and Wildlife and the County, we have been unable to resolve the apprehensions that the County has and to secure any assurances for the County and our water users.

First, by purchasing the Shasta Big Springs Ranch, the Fish and Wildlife would be removing the property from private ownership and would be removing property tax revenue that is annually paid to the County. In June 2013, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution (attached) establishing a policy of no net increase in state and federal land ownership within the County. In this resolution it was noted that the Fish and Wildlife has perpetually failed to make promised payments of property tax to the County, owing \$565,878 as of fiscal year 2012-2013. It would be very difficult for the Board of Supervisors to support, or abstain from objecting, to yet another

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Brandon Criss  
*District 1*

Ed Valenzuela  
*District 2*

Michael N. Kobseff  
*District 3*

Lisa Nixon  
*District 4*

Ray Haupt  
*District 5*

purchase of private property by the State when taxes will most likely not be paid. In addition to the taxes, the property is currently enrolled under the Williamson Act tax break provisions, which the County previously approved due to its agricultural production, which subsidizes costs paid to the County by approximately \$76,000 dollars. The County would no longer support the property's enrollment under the Williamson Act as anticipated management of the land, as indicated by Fish and Wildlife, would not support active agricultural production. The conservation easement purchased by the Fish and Wildlife dedicates the property's water rights for in-stream purposes throughout the majority of the irrigation season, and only allows water diversions under certain circumstances. In fact, it was reported that in 2016, the property was only irrigated for five days, which does not indicate a reliable irrigation or grazing opportunity in future years. When TNC purchased the property in 2009, it was with the intent and commitment that the property would still support agricultural while performing projects to improve fisheries habitat. When the Fish and Wildlife later purchased the water rights, we were concerned and anticipated that the property would be neglected for agricultural purposes. Currently, the property is overgrown by weeds and other vegetation and has not been adequately grazed. For a County that depends heavily, and is supported greatly, by its farms and ranches, this is, and will continue to be, a concern for us.

Lastly, we have previously addressed the need to initiate a blanket Safe Harbor process for both the Shasta and Scott Valleys, which would outline reasonable out-migrant and in-migrant coho salmon numbers for the Shasta and Scott Rivers, and would provide assurances for our water users. This is related to the Shasta Big Springs Ranch as one of the original goals of the TNC's purchase of the property was to improve water temperature and quality and provide some regulatory relief to water users within the Shasta Valley. Over the last several decades, other landowners and landowner's groups within the Shasta Valley have been implementing and completing projects with these same goals in mind. However, we have not seen any relief for our landowners, or any urgency to discuss what water quality would need to look like or what fisheries numbers would need to be in order to provide "game over" for governmental oversight and regulation. We see the need to seriously consider options for blanket Safe Harbors and developing water quality and fisheries targets for the Shasta and Scott rivers, and anticipate that Fish and Wildlife would play a large role in this.

Again, we reiterate that at this time we have significant concerns regarding Fish and Wildlife's potential purchase of the Shasta Big Springs Ranch. If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact our Natural Resource Policy Specialist, Elizabeth Nielsen, at (530) 842-8012 or [enielsen@co.siskiyou.ca.us](mailto:enielsen@co.siskiyou.ca.us).

This letter was approved by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors on June 06, 2017, by the following vote:

AYES: Supervisors Criss, Haupt, Valenzuela, Nixon and Kobseff

NOES: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael N. Kobseff", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael N. Kobseff, Chair  
Board of Supervisors

cc: Assemblyman Brian Dahle

cc: California Governor Jerry Brown