



Protecting and Restoring the Santa Barbara Channel and Its Watersheds

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April 17, 2008

Santa Barbara Planning Commission
735 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Attn: Allison De Busk, Associate Planner
Re: Veronica Meadows

Dear Commissioners,

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper is extremely concerned that the City is considering alternatives to the Veronica Meadows Project that include significant and unavoidable impacts to Arroyo Burro Creek.

Over the last several years, the City has spent hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars on projects designed to restore Arroyo Burro Creek and improve water quality. These projects include the restoration of Arroyo Burro Estuary restoration project (\$1 Million), the Las Positas Storm Water Detention project (\$300K), the Urban Runoff Diversion Project at Hope Avenue (\$500K), the Las Positas Valley Restoration (\$125K), the proposed Santa Barbara Golf Club Stormwater Management Project, along with ongoing creek cleanups, water quality monitoring, and DNA studies. From these actions, it seems apparent that the City of Santa Barbara considers the protection and restoration of its creeks and water quality a priority issue, especially along Arroyo Burro Creek. The City has invested significant money into these projects and also into maintaining many talented and dedicated staff persons currently working to restore this creek. Channelkeeper therefore finds it puzzling and disconcerting that the City should consider alternatives to the Veronica Meadows Project that include significant and unavoidable impacts to Arroyo Burro Creek.

While the alteration of creek ecosystems resulting from one project may often seem worthwhile or mitigatable through restoration, the cumulative water quality impacts caused by loss of natural creek habitat throughout a watershed are enormously significant and irreversible. We at Channelkeeper would like to believe that the City of Santa Barbara has moved beyond the days of approving projects that directly impact the most sensitive environments within its boundaries, especially when there are feasible alternatives available that would avoid Class I impacts.

The City is obligated to the citizens of Santa Barbara to protect its natural resources and water quality. It is also obligated to make decisions that comply with the CEQA process and avoid Class I impacts when feasible alternatives exist. Should the City decide that these alternatives are not politically desirable, then it should deny the Veronica Meadows project altogether, not pursue a project alternative that causes significant impacts to the environment. Channelkeeper strongly urges that the Commission does **NOT** approve any alternative that significantly impacts the environmental resources of Arroyo Burro Creek.

Respectfully,

Ben Pitterle
Watershed Programs Director
Santa Barbara Channelkeeper