

County balks on pursuing an HCP

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Dear Editor,

The Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a legally binding planning document that allows landowners or developers to proceed with lawful activities while minimizing and mitigating impacts on endangered or threatened species. There are currently 40 to 50 HCPs in California and 15 state Natural Communities Conservation Plans (NCCPs), 14 of which are done in conjunction with an HCP.

Without these plans, every individual development must perform costly studies that can delay and sometimes kill otherwise worthy projects. The updated 2019 Calaveras County General Plan proposes to “pursue a countywide habitat conservation plan,” in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife but will do so only “subject to available funding (Implementation Measure COS-4C).”

Funding for federal HCPs and state NCCPs is and has been available. In 2013, before the updated 2019 General Plan was adopted, the Board of Supervisors returned over \$10,000 of a \$68,000 grant awarded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in 2008. The \$68,000 was to fund first steps and hire a consultant to write a grant to begin the actual HCP/NCCP process, which can take years and millions of dollars. That initial grant was not successful, but it could have been rewritten and submitted in the next funding cycle.

Instead, the pursuit of an HCP was abandoned and our tax dollars in the form of grant funds were wasted. Yes, HCPs facilitate development, but they take time, money, and commitment. In spite of previously failing to vigorously pursue an HCP, the county still pretends to want one as articulated in COS-4C.

However, a 2019 General Plan Update implementation measure that has no hope of ever being implemented because it is predicated on the availability of funding for which the county won't apply is no implementation measure at all. It is a lie. Funding is available but the Board of Supervisors won't authorize the overworked Planning Department to hire a grant writer to apply for funding for a HCP or any of a myriad of other implementation measures, so they remain just hollow, unfunded words. Calaveras County deserves better.

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