County of Santa Cruz

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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AGENDA: MAY 18, 1999

May 6, 1999

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

SUBJECT: BUENA VISTA LANDFILL SOIL MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Members of the Board:

On April 13, 1999, your Board continued deliberations on the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project to provide additional time for review of the Watsonville City Landfill alternative, On March 23, 1999 and April 13, 1999, your Board was provided with detailed analyses of the Watsonville City Landfill site alternative as required under condition A. 12 of the Coastal Zone permit approved by your Board on October 20, 1998. Please refer to these previously transmitted documents for additional information on project alternatives and conditions of approval. The following report outlines the most significant issues your Board must consider in making a final decision regarding this project. The primary issues to be considered in deciding whether to use the previously approved Rocha property or the Watsonville City Landfill property for this project includes biotic impacts and mitigations, public cost, temporary loss of agricultural land, residential impacts, and timing and permitting risks. Discussions of other related impacts can be found in the previous analyses referenced above.

Executive Summary

As discussed in the following report, the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site is a feasible project alternative for the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project based upon the most current information available to staff However, the following is a summary of the most significant issues your Board has to consider in order to determine if this is the most appropriate direction to take with this project:

1. **The Watsonville Landfill project would cost $2.1 million more than the Board-approved Rocha project and $2.8 million more than modified the Rocha project as discussed later in this report.**

2. **The Watsonville Landfill project adds 2+/- years to the time line vs. the Rocha project which is ready for construction and operations pending the Coastal Commission's final determination.**
3. **There is a substantial increase in risk to the successful project implementation due to the many unknown conditions and/or obstacles that may arise through a new permitting process.**
4. **The Watsonville Landfill project results in more significant biotic impacts than the recommended project, however it does not impact agricultural resources.**
5. **The Watsonville Landfill project is 700 feet closer to residential dwellings than the Rocha project.**

The following table is an update from Public Works' April 9, 1999, letter to your Board summarizing the key project considerations that are discussed in more detail later in this report:

PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

	Rocha Site (as revised)	Rocha Site (as permitted)	Watsonville Site (BVCA option)
Start-up Timing	3 -4 months	3-4 months	2 years +/-
Project Uncertainties	Pending Approvals: 1. Army Corp* 2. CA Fish and Game* 3. Coastal Commission	Pending Approvals: 1. Army corps* 2. CA Fish and Game* 3. Coastal Commission	New Approvals needed: 1. Board of Supervisors 2. Planning Commission 3. CEQA/EIR 4. Army corps 5. US Fish and Wildlife 6. CA Fish and Game 7. Coastal Commission 8. Air District 9. Regional Water Board 10. Union Pacific/PUC 11. Watsonville City Council 12. Waste Management Board

	Rocha Site (as revised)	Rocha Site (as permitted)	Watsonville Site (BVCA option)
Environmental Considerations	1. Taking of 0.4 (was 0.79) acres of highly degraded riparian habitat 2. Restoration and expansion of riparian habitat totaling 2.4 acres. 3. Placement of restored habitat, all existing habitat, and 3.5 acres of biotic buffer land into permanent protective easement. 4. Temporary creation of 18 acres of additional open space buffer and protective structures to protect newly established habitat. 5. Temporary taking of 30 acres of Class IV ag land 6. Restoration and drainage improvement of ag land at project closure. 7. Placement of project 1,300 feet from nearest residential dwelling and confined within a protected ravine.	1. Taking of 0.4 (was 0.79) acres of highly degraded riparian habitat 2. Restoration and expansion of riparian habitat totaling 2.4 acres. 3. Placement of restored habitat, all existing habitat, and 3.5 acres of biotic buffer land into permanent protective easement. 4. Temporary creation of 18 acres of additional open space buffer and protective structures to protect newly established habitat. 5. Temporary taking of 30 acres of Class IV ag land. 6. Restoration and drainage improvement of ag land at project closure. 7. Placement of project 1,300 feet from nearest residential dwelling and confined within a protected ravine.	1. Taking of 0.5 acres of Biotic Conservation Easement for site access and 2.1 acres of riparian habitat for the stockpile site. 2. Replacement of 4.2 acres of habitat for the stockpile site at a designated Watsonville Landfill mitigation area. 3. Replacement of 1.5 acres of habitat for the Biotic Conservation Easement loss at a site to-be-determined. 4. Increased dust emissions and impacts adjacent to and within the Biotic Conservation Easement Crossing and perimeter near the soil stockpile operations. 5. Increased dust and noise impacts for neighbor located 600 from project. 6. Placement of project 600 feet from a residential dwelling and exposed at the top of a ridge within a larger residential the viewshed area.

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* Army Corps of Engineers has informed Public Works that a permit for this project is nearly complete, but they cannot legally issue the permit until the Coastal Commission makes its final determination on the pending appeal. CDFG has informed Public Works that they will issue our streambed agreement once the Army Corps of Engineers has issued their permit. CDFG has provided us with an outline of the draft agreement they have prepared and it basically requires compliance with the Army Crops of Engineers permit conditions and County Coastal Zone permit conditions.

Our department is very aware of the controversial nature of this project. Unfortunately, by its very nature this project will have impacts wherever it is located and raise controversial issues. The only other alternative available to your Board at this time would be to terminate further consideration of an off-site soil storage facility and immediately begin planning for the early closure of the Buena Vista Landfill and the related financial and operational impacts.

Your Board has already approved the Rocha site project that has undergone two and a half years of public and resource agency reviews and modifications including four rounds of CEQA document review, four public hearings before the Planning Commission, two neighborhood workshops, four Board hearings, two Coastal Commission hearings (three including next month's meeting), and numerous negotiation and information sharing sessions with local neighbors and all the involved resource agencies. The result is a well-balanced project that meets most of the needs and expressed concerns of the neighborhood groups and the resource agencies. In addition, there is a great public benefit to the biotic mitigation plans for this project by expanding, restoring and permanently protecting several acres of critical habitat (the highest priority of the Coastal Act of 1976).

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The decision before your Board is very important and understandably very difficult. The following report outlines and summarizes all of the key issues that will need to be considered in making this decision. The Rocha site project approved by your Board on October 20, 1998, is the culmination of more than two and a half years of work and countless staff hours of design work, alternative analysis, and negotiations with resources agencies and local neighbors. It is Public Works' opinion that this is a well-balanced project that meets the overall needs and objectives of all the resource agencies and the local neighbors. Use of the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site provides some benefit, mainly in the avoidance of temporary agricultural land loss, but is considerably more expensive, has greater biotic and residential impacts, and many permitting and CEQA issues need to be completed with no guarantee of success.

Biotic Impacts

The biotic impacts associated with use of the Rocha property have been well documented or reviewed by registered biologists and technical staff from many agencies including the County's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) consultant, Harding Lawson and Associates (HLA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, California Fish and Game (CDFG), California Coastal Commission, and County Environmental Planning. The site of the proposed soil storage area has historically had little or no habitat of significant biological value. Photographic records dating back to 193 1 have verified that no mature habitat has existed on this site due to farming and grazing activities. Current management practices have resulted in the periodic removal of vegetation and regrading of this site to facilitate farming or weed control. Farming practices on the steep slopes of this site have resulted in severe erosion and deposition of sediments into waterways feeding Gallighan Slough. Uncontrolled sediment releases from this site have also caused flooding and road damage at the entrance to the Buena Vista Landfill. In addition, this site has previously been red-tagged and placed on the County's Watershed violation list for severe erosion.

The soil storage project on the Rocha site has been specifically designed to permanently mitigate these erosion problems and for this reason County Planning included several specific conditions of approval in the permit documents specifically addressing drainage improvements. The Regional Water Quality Control Board is also in support of this project and has waived, without condition, the mandate for waste discharge requirements due to the proposed drainage improvements which meet their objectives of improving water quality in this area. A copy of this waiver and project approval is included in Exhibit D.

In addition to the above described site characteristics, there has been and continues to be a significant amount of agricultural refuse deposited in and along the drainage ravine. Please refer to the photos in Attachment B of the March 23, 1999, Alternatives Analysis for visual examples of existing habitat conditions. We have also just documented the farm operations regrading of the site, which resulted in the removal of approximately 0.4 acres of the "defined" jurisdictional habitat within the soil storage area. The remaining 0.4 acres of habitat are composed of individual trees isolated along the drainage corridor and a small band of trees at the top of the

ravine. All of the drainage ravine and supporting vegetation has been cleared for farming. These farming impacts to the habitat are consistent with our previous documentation of site activities and concurrent observations of the CDFG biologist assigned to review the project EIR in 1997. Exhibit A includes the February 27, 1997, letter from CDFG Biologist, Jeannine DeWald, which describes the habitat quality on the Rocha site as **"extremely low."** The recent farming activities described above have reduced habitat value even further. For your reference we have also included the original habitat delineation map.

The Watsonville Landfill Expansion site is located immediately southwest of the closed section of the Buena Vista Landfill, approximately 0.5 miles from the active landfill soil excavation area. Lying between the closed Buena Vista Landfill and the Watsonville City Landfill Expansion site is a mature habitat consisting of riparian, oak woodland, northern coastal scrub, and grassland. In 1985, the City of Watsonville completed an EIR for their landfill expansion, also known as Phases IV and V. On May 28, 1985, CDFG Director, Jack Parnell, issued a letter commenting on the EIR for the Watsonville Landfill Expansion. In that letter he characterized the on-site habitat as being of **"high value to wildlife"** and of **"exceptional quality and pristine condition."** He went on further to deem this habitat as **"environmentally sensitive."** A copy of this letter is included in Exhibit for your reference along with the EIR's habitat delineation map.

In recognition of the biological value of this habitat, your Board approved a Biotic Conservation Easement (BCE) on May 4, 1993, dedicating and permanently protecting this sensitive habitat from future development impacts. Exhibit A includes a copy of the recorded map outlining the aerial extent of BCE. Exhibit B is a copy of the Board executed BCE for this habitat area bisecting the County and City landfills.

In order to access the Watsonville City Landfill site for our long term temporary soil storage project, an access road will have to be cut through the BCE. At a minimum this road will have to support the conveyor system, physical access for maintenance vehicles, and drainage facilities. Dense riparian undergrowth and steep slopes prevent any close evaluation of the underlying soil conditions and topography. Pending a full geotechnical investigation, we have conservatively estimated that this access road will result in a loss of 0.4 to 0.5 acres of habitat within the BCE. This impact is contingent upon successful negotiations with the City of Watsonville regarding the use of their equipment and staff to move the County's soil stored on their site, in lieu of constructing a much larger heavy equipment crossing for access of County earthmoving equipment.

In considering this alternative, your Board must weigh the advantages of the Watsonville site against the impacts to this protected biotic resource. Impacts include not only the physical loss of habitat in the BCE for the conveyor access, but also the general impacts to wildlife in the area of the BCE surrounding the conveyor system.

In addition to the biotic impacts within the BCE, there will be an additional loss of approximately 2.1 acres of riparian habitat within the expansion site itself This riparian habitat area is located within a natural drainage course that bisects the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site. This

habitat area, also known as the "riparian finger," sits in the middle of the expansion site and would have to be removed to accommodate the soil storage operations. The loss of this habitat area was considered in the landfill expansion plans, and the Coastal Zone permit requires completion of a 4.2 acre mitigation project on site as compensation for this loss. However, during Coastal Commission review of this project an added condition was placed into the permit, eliminating approval for construction of the Phase V area where the above described riparian finger lies. In order to receive Coastal Commission approval for the taking of the riparian finger and utilizing the Phase V area, an amendment to the Coastal Zone permit is required along with a cooperative planning study to evaluate potential landfill consolidation. The Coastal Commission's intent was to fully evaluate Watsonville's landfill options in the future and any changes in regional landfilling conditions, prior to allowing the full development of this site for a landfill and the subsequent 2.1 acre biotic loss. The biotic taking on this site would be occurring approximately 12-14 years earlier than currently planned.

Biotic Mitigations

Registered biologists and staff from the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CDFG, Coastal Commission, County Environmental Planning, and HLA have all visited the Rocha site and each has agreed that the site is severely degraded from historical agricultural operations. County documentation has shown that no mature biotic habitat has existed on the project site since before 193 1 (oldest available aerial photo). Unless agricultural activities are curtailed or eliminated from this parcel it would not be reasonable to anticipate any improvement in biotic quality due to the natural topography of the site. Each resource staffmember has also concluded that there is great biological value in restoration of the north ravine on the project site to facilitate a migratory connection between upland and lowland biotic habitats and two existing on-site riparian corridors. Re-creation of this link will be one step toward opening future potential migration paths for species of concern to expand into the lowland habitats. The Coastal Zone permit approved by your Board on October 20, 1998, includes an extensive mitigation plan to expand, rehabilitate and protect, in perpetuity, all biotic resources on this property (more than 5 acres including construction of 50-foot wide oak/grassland buffers around all new and existing on-site habitats), in exchange for the loss of 0.79 acres of degraded habitat (recently reduced to 0.4 acres), In addition, another 10 acres of open space surrounding the protected biotic areas will be dedicated for the life of the project to facilitate the maturation process of the restored and newly created riparian habitat, as recommended by the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CDFG, and Coastal Commission.

The Rocha site project has been designed and modified to meet the basic goals of the California Coastal Act:

> Public Resources Code, Section 30001.5: "The Legislature finds and declares that the basic goals of the state for the coastal zone are to:
> (a) Protect, maintain, and where feasible, enhance and restore the overall quality of the coastal zone environment and its natural and artificial resources.
> (b) Assure orderly, balanced utilization and conservation of coastal zone resources taking into account the social and economic needs of the people of the state."

This project utilizes a parcel with minimal biological value. In exchange for the temporary loss of lower quality agriculture land, this project provides for the expansion, enhancement, and permanent protection of a potentially valuable biotic resource. This was the clear directive and area of greatest concern for the Coastal Commissioners during our first hearing before them regarding this project in August 1998. In response to the Coastal Commission's concerns, the project was modified in consultation with the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Coastal Commission staff, CDFG and County Environmental Planning to include additional biotic mitigation areas and increased protective measures. The Coastal Zone permit approved by your Board reflects this expanded and enhanced biotic mitigation effort, consistent with the overall goals of the 1976 Coastal Act and the direction of the Coastal Commissioners. There is a great public benefit to this biotic mitigation plan by expanding, restoring and permanently protecting several acres of critical habitat.

This project also considers a balanced use of this property within the coastal zone by establishing a balance between biotic resource conservation and enhancement, public concerns, fiscal responsibility, and long term waste disposal needs for our county residents. From a long term biological perspective this project meets all the objectives of the Coastal Act goals and at the same time solves a significant public service need in a financially prudent manner.

Exhibit C is a copy of the preliminary habitat management plan for the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site including a delineation of the BCE. Please note the dark shaded areas on this map represent the riparian finger scheduled for removal with the construction of Watsonville's City Landfill Phase V construction. This finger will require early removal for use as a soil storage site, as the soil stockpile footprint is very similar to the landfill footprint due to the site's steep topography. This drawing also depicts the various areas requiring biotic mitigation prior to development. Use of the Watsonville site will require several key actions regarding the biological impacts and mitigations.

1. The Board must amend the BCE, with CDFG, Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and Coastal Commission approvals, to allow for the new taking and ancillary impacts within this protected habitat.
2. Per Coastal Zone permit 96-0216, condition C.3, the County must seek Coastal Commission approval to amend the Watsonville Landfill Expansion permit to allow use of the Phase V disposal site and remove the 2.1 acre riparian finger. This amendment must include a waiver or deferral of the landfill consolidation study requirement also included in this condition.
3. Permit approval must be obtained from Army Corps of Engineers, CDFG, Regional Water Quality Control Board for the loss of biotic habitat, including an acceptable mitigation plan.
4. The County must complete the 4.2 acre biotic mitigation and habitat management plan (on-site) required for the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site, prior to using the site for soil storage.
5. A mitigation site for the additional 0.5 acre BCE loss will have to be located and designed. On-site mitigation may be possible, but preliminary field investigations of potential on-site mitigation areas have not found any areas large enough (1.0-1.5 acres) or hydraulically adequate for sustainable riparian planting.

Differences in habitat quality between the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site and the Rocha site are very clear and have been defined in detail in the previous alternatives analyses referenced above. Please refer to those reports for additional information on valuation of biological resources and impacts. There is minimal biotic value to the area of the Rocha site planned for soil storage activities and the mitigation package proposed for this site is substantial and of significant biological value. The Watsonville Landfill Expansion site, while partially permitted for a future landfill expansion, would result in the loss of valuable biotic habitat within a BCE, premature taking of 2.2 acres of riparian habitat, construction of up to 5.5 acres of riparian mitigation areas for the City of Watsonville, and a new round of permitting processes with the involved resource agencies.

Project Costs

The Rocha site, as approved by your Board, calls for movement of soil from the Buena Vista Landfill to the Rocha property via an overhead conveyor. Return of soil to the landfill over the next 20+ years would occur via dump trucks. In our April 9, 1999, letter to your Board, we recommended an alternative soil return process that would not only reduce project costs, but also reduce dust and traffic impacts. Soil returned via conveyor would all but eliminate any crossing truck traffic on Buena Vista Drive and reduce dust impacts associated with dump truck travel on dirt roads. Local neighbors have expressed concerns over these two issues and this minor project revision would substantially address those concerns. Soil return to the landfill is not anticipated to begin for 5-6 years, so adequate time exists to consider these project modifications without jeopardizing the current project time lines for Phase 1 excavation. The only potential impact would be to the Buena Vista Drive scenic corridor area adjacent to the landfill. However, this is an issue for both project alternatives, as they are both visible from Buena Vista Drive and surrounding residents. We only anticipate the need for a minor permit amendment as the project changes primarily result in reduced impacts, but adequate time exists if a supplemental EIR is required.

Your Board has previously been provided with project cost analyses conducted using a standard time and materials approach. These analyses reflected projected costs for the current Board approved project, the "modified" Rocha project (soil return with conveyor), and the most cost effective Watsonville City Landfill alternative, as recommended by local neighbors. In an effort to simplify these analyses we have used present dollars for both the up-front expenses and the long term operational expenses. While use of inflation factors for long term operation and maintenance costs or net present values for capital can be used to further modify the overall costs, they can also add a level of complexity and confusion to the analysis. We could also place a public value to the extensive mitigation plan on the Rocha site in terms of habitat protection and expansion for public benefit.

These cost analyses were provided in a simplified format to allow a basic comparison of project costs, without the intention of creating a complex financial document. As an example, the costs for returning soil from the Watsonville site are significantly higher due to the much longer haul distance. We could inflate the higher annual operating costs by one of several financial indices to project increases in time and materials cost over the project life. This type of detailed financial analysis can be approached in several ways with many differing outcomes. Use of net present value for land acquisition can also be analyzed in several differing ways and using differing discount rates

and future projections. In order to avoid over analyzation of project costs, we elected to provide a simple time and materials approach with no inflation or future valuation factors for any of the project alternatives of the Rocha project. This straightforward approach was used consistently across the board for each alternative analyzed.

There has also been some suggestion that the project cost analyses reflect a higher soil movement volume than addressed in the EIR. As this project has moved through this lengthy public review process, we have received many comments and suggestions from the involved resource agencies and concerned citizens. The changes in the cost analysis reflecting a greater volume of soil movement are the result of project improvements and efficiencies aimed at reducing impacts and costs. It has been our understanding from comments and suggestions received during previous public hearings that local neighbors would support project conditions that would shorten or reduce the impacts on any of the project alternatives considered. While it is true that the cost analysis reflects a greater soil movement than estimated in the EIR documents, the amount of soil moved is only important with regard to air quality issues. Public Works has received a permit from the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) for this project and the conditions are structured to allow the maximum amount of project flexibility and soil movement with appropriate controls to maintain emissions within the air district standards. A copy of the MBUAPCD permit is included for your reference as Exhibit D.

As an example, a local neighbor, Mr. David Barlow, suggested relocation of the conveyor load-out closer to the excavation area to reduce the overall length of the conveyor to the Watsonville site and also reduce the conveyor costs. This was a very good suggestion and was determined to be beneficial to either project alternative. The only factor limiting the amount of soil moved each day is dust emissions. By moving the conveyor load-out closer to the excavation area we shorten the haul distance for the earthmovers and thus reduce dust emissions. This suggestion improves project efficiencies by allowing a greater movement of soil in a shorter period, and reducing the length of the excavation period and associated impacts. The MBUAPCD was very helpful in structuring the permit for this project to allow this operating flexibility that improves project efficiencies and reduces costs, while still maintaining dust emissions within MBUAPCD standards.

In a similar manner, we also assumed maximum soil volume movement with the Watsonville site alternatives to minimize project duration and impacts. However, for consistency with the EIR projections, we have adjusted the cost analysis to reflect the lower soil movement volumes for all project options. Exhibit E includes the revised cost analysis.

There also continues to be discussion over the actual value of the Rocha property. In May 1997, an appraisal of the Rocha property, including land, structures and improvements, was conducted by an outside, third party registered appraiser who specializes in agricultural property appraisals. The result of this appraisal has been used as the basis for our valuation of the Rocha property in our cost analyses. At your Board's direction, this appraisal was updated in October 1998 to reflect current market conditions. The original appraisal valued the property at $600,000, and the updated appraisal revised the value to $690,000. A copy of the revised appraisal cover sheet is included for your reference in Exhibit E. Based on a 1990 lease/purchase agreement for a

previous tenant farmer, which placed a sale value of $480,000 on the property, the current appraisal appears to be reasonable taking into consideration nine years of inflation. Outside of anecdotal statements by project opponents, we have no new information that would suggest or support a higher value for this property.

The previously submitted cost analyses only provided discussion of the potential costs associated with advanced development of the Watsonville Landfill site, such as construction of the landfill expansion drainage facilities and mitigation for the 2.1 acre riparian loss associated with the landfill expansion. Both of these activities are required permit conditions for Watsonville and must be completed before they can construct a landfill in this area or the County can use the site for soil storage. Exhibit E includes these added costs not originally considered and as stated above, adjusts the Phase 1 excavation volumes back to the EIR projections for consistency. Watsonville City staff has also informed the County that there exists some off-site drainage problems from an adjacent property owner that may require some improvements beyond those associated with the landfill expansion. However, no technical information is available regarding this off-site drainage problem and therefore no cost can be assigned to these added mitigation activities at this time.

After discussions with Watsonville City staff and management, we have developed a preliminary list and cost estimate for the lease payments and project related improvements they have initially requested as compensation for County use of their site for soil storage. These only reflect beneficial costs for the City of Watsonville associated with leasing the land and compliance with their Coastal Zone permit conditions for landfill development. These costs do not include County costs for BCE mitigation, Union Pacific permits or other costs associated with gaining access to the Watsonville site or construction of soil handling facilities. Below is a summary of the City of Watsonville compensation package:

CITY OF WATSONVILLE COMPENSATION

Lease Payment ($1,000 per acre, per year)*	$400,000
4.2 Acre Riparian Mitigation ($75,000 per acre/Coastal Zone permit requirement)	**$315,004**
Construction of Permanent, Vegetated Noise Buffer for Higaki Property	$50,000
Implementation of Habitat Management Plan (County share, $6,000 per year)*	$120,000
Drainage/Road Improvements (Coastal Zone permit requirement)	$110,000
BCE Protective Fencing, 2,800' (Coastal Zone permit requirement)	**$32,000**
Permitting & Coastal Zone Permit Amendment (Coastal Zone permit requirement, County share)	**$60,000**
Landfill Space Exchange (City Council/Board of Supervisors Decision)	$?
Estimated Total for City of Watsonville Compensation Package:	**$1,087,000**

*Assumed a 20-year project period.

The following is a summary of the revised costs reflecting the adjustments as described above and Phase 1 soil excavation at EIR estimated rates. This compensation package outlined above.

SUMMARY OF OVERALL COSTS AND IMPACTS

	Rocha Site (as revised)	Rocha Site (as permitted)	Watsonville Site (BVCA option)
Capital/O&M Costs - Excavation	$1,727,859	$1,345,859	$2,867,117
Equipment Costs - Excavation	$1,913,888	$1,913,888	$1,936,137
Capital/O&M Costs - Soil Return	$384,046	$0	$82,403
Equipment Costs -Soil Return	$2,354,758	$3,866,678	$4,320,688
Total:	$6,380,046	$7,126,424	$9,206,345
Cost Differential:	**$0**	**+$746,378**	**+$2,825,299**

In comparing the cost summary above with the summary previously provided to your Board in our letter of April 9, 1999, we find that movement of soil during Phase 1 of the project at a higher volume is far more efficient, reduces the duration of project related impacts and reduces cost by more than $800,000. The previous cost analysis assumed movement of soil at a rate of 8,800 cubic yards per day vs. the EIR estimate of 5,400 cubic yards per day reflected in the above numbers. As discussed above, this increase in soil movement efficiency is provided for under the MBUAPCD permit which allows more soil movement if the total daily vehicle miles traveled by earthmoving equipment are maintained below a fixed level. By moving the conveyor load-out area closer to the excavation site, as suggested by the neighborhood group, we are effectively reducing the total round trip distance of the earthmoving equipment and can therefore move more loads per day without exceeding MBUAPCD standards. This permit condition will provide a significant benefit to any of the project options through more efficient movement of soil.

With the year 2000 goals approaching for compliance with AB 939 objectives, cost containment for this project is also very important. We need to provide adequate funding for new and expanded diversion and recycling programs in order to meet the 50% landfill diversion mandate under AB 939. The modified Rocha project provides significant cost savings that can be used for other public service and waste diversion projects and at the same time reduces the overall environmental impacts for the project.

Agricultural Impacts

Consideration must be given to the value of the temporary loss of agricultural lands on the Rocha site vs. the overall public benefit from this project. The Watsonville site is no longer zoned for agriculture, and therefore no loss of agricultural lands would result. This is the most significant benefit of using the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site.

As previously discussed, selection of the Rocha site was based on several factors: close proximity to the excavation activities, distance from residential dwellings, confinement in an enclosed ravine to reduce visual and noise impacts, and quality of agricultural land. Prior to the mid 1980s the southern ravine of this property (stockpile site) was primarily used for grazing. Historical photos have confirmed that grazing activities eliminated most if not all of the potential habitat vegetation. Once farming was initiated in this area of the property, some natural recurrence of riparian vegetation began in the central drainage course and in a freshwater seep area at the top of the ravine. Farming activities have, however, periodically eliminated this growth or severely impacted it, as previously documented. In 1996 when Public Works first determined this site to be the most appropriate location for soil storage operations, the entire site lay fallow and remained so until last year when a new farmer began to farm in this area again. The quality of the soil on this parcel is mostly defined as Class IV (Class I and II being defined as "Prime Agricultural Land). The only other information we have been able to gather on the quality of production or soil history from this area of the parcel are anecdotal statements from growers and other third party information that could not be substantiated by factual information.

However, with regard to the Rocha property, your Board has approved a substantial mitigation package for this loss in the amount of $240,000 to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and an added direction to minimize agricultural land losses as much as possible through stockpile modifications, where feasible. Permit conditions also require complete restoration and improvements to the parcel at project closure to facilitate return to agricultural production. The post project permit conditions were established by Coastal Commission staff and counsel and accepted as a very fair compensation package for a temporary loss of agricultural production on this section of the parcel, particularly in light of the substantial biotic improvements.

Residential Impacts

The Rocha site soil storage project is designed to reduce residential impacts to the greatest extent. The project, as approved by your Board, reflects nearly 2 years of negotiations with local neighbors and involved resource agencies. This project now balances the needs of the general public, resource conservation agencies, and the project's rural neighborhood. The key features of the Rocha site project as they pertain to mitigation for residential impacts include:

1. Soil stockpiling is located in a closed ended ravine that will assist in mitigating noise, dust and visual impacts.

2. The nearest residence is 1,300 feet to the north of the stockpile site and separated from the project site by two ridges, a eucalyptus grove and the future biotic mitigation site. All these features provide an added level of mitigation for the items listed in item 1 above.
3. Use of a conveyor system to move soil to the soil stockpile area, and possibly for return, nearly eliminates heavy equipment traffic on Buena Vista Drive and reduces associated dust and noise.
4. The project's biotic mitigation package will improve habitat quality and provide an improved viewshed for adjacent residences and local traffic.

The Watsonville Expansion site also has some important features with regard to residential impacts including:

1. Only two adjacent residents to consider, one at 600 feet from the project site and one at 2,100 feet.
2. Use of this site already includes a permit condition requiring construction of a vegetated berm to reduce noise impacts from the future landfill activities.
3. Use of a conveyor system to move soil to and from the soil stockpile area, and possibly for return, eliminates heavy equipment traffic on Buena Vista Drive and reduces associated dust and noise.
4. The project's biotic mitigation package will improve habitat quality and provide an improved viewshed for the one adjacent resident.

The most significant issue with the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site is the impact to the local residential viewshed. The stockpile operation on the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site will be located on top of a predominant ridge that sits within the coastal viewshed of many of the Rancho Road, Tulsa Lane and Whiskey Hill residents. Both County and City landfill operations staff receive occasional complaints from local residents due to the exposed nature of the Watsonville Landfill operations at the top of this ridge. Placement of a large soil stockpile on this ridge would further degrade the ocean and local scenic viewshed to a far greater extent than use of the closed ravine on the Rocha site.

An additional residential impact associated with the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site would be the closer proximity of the operation to the Higaki home (600'). While item 2 above does provide for mitigation of impacts, this project is still considerably closer to a residential dwelling than the Rocha project and is located in a much more exposed area. In comparison to the Rocha project there would be a comparatively higher impact.

Timing and Permitting Risks

Regardless of the biotic impacts, cost differentials, residential impacts or agricultural land preservation concerns, it is Public Works'opinion that the alternative soil storage project on the Watsonville City Landfill Expansion site is feasible, based on the available information we have gathered to-date. However, there are still many risks related to timing and permitting issues that also need to be fully considered before making a change in project direction.

A. A new round of environmental review (CEQA) needs to proceed immediately. We cannot move forward with any permitting processes without CEQA documents. Counsel for BVCA believes it would take the County only 3-6 months, but it is our opinion, based on the length of the current process, that two years a realistic time frame. Development of a scope of work, and selection and hiring of an EIR consultant will take at least six months, plus at least another year and a half for EIR development and multiple rounds of public review. This process could be much longer, as in the current case, if neighbors adjacent to the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site file appeals with the decision and permitting bodies throughout the process. As directed, the Planning Department will be providing your Board with an estimation of the CEQA and permitting process time frame for the Watsonville Landfill site project alternative.

B. Design level engineering and geotechnical investigation will also need to proceed immediately to accompany the CEQA process and resolve design and permitting related cost issues associated with the conveyor route through the Biotic Conservation Easement.

C. Your Board will also have to weigh the value of the biotic impacts between the two sites. As has been well documented, the biotic area to be lost on the Rocha site has very little habitat value, while the habitat between the County and City is of such significance that it was placed into a permanent protective Biotic Conservation Easement, Both the taking of habitat and the impacts from operations on the bisecting road should be considered. In addition, the Rocha site project also includes a substantial biotic mitigation plan that has been endorsed and cooperatively designed by all the involved biotic resource agencies. Biologists from all the resource agencies have agreed that the biotic mitigation plan on the Rocha site will provide a valuable restoration of lost habitat and migratory corridors. Both permitting and mitigation for these new biotic impacts will take a substantial amount of time and expense to complete.

D. The existing Biotic Conservation Easement (BCE) between the County and City landfills will have to be amended by your Board, under consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corp of Engineers, California Coastal Commission, and California Department of Fish and Game to allow the necessary taking within the easement to accommodate the conveyor and access road between the sites. Based upon our experience with these resource agencies, we should anticipate at least one year or more to complete all the required permitting processes.

F. Higher level negotiations with the Watsonville City Council will have to take place in order to accommodate this project. Many significant decisions will be required by both jurisdictions regarding the future valuation and exchange of landfill capacity, and determination of financial responsibilities associated with early development of their landfill expansion site.

G. Your Board will have to consider the cost differential and its short and long term impacts to landfill services. We are approaching the year 2000 landfill-diversion requirements of 50%. In order to meet these goals, the County needs to direct as much of our staff and financial resources as possible toward this diversion goal in order to comply with the State mandates. Diversion of staff and funding resources away from public service projects (i.e. recycling programs) directed at attaining this goal will undoubtably have some impacts both financially and from a time commitment standpoint.

H. Impacts to landfill operations must also be considered. This revised project has been discussed at length with landfill operations staff and they have continued to express strong reservations over the impacts associated with this project. It is clearly more labor intensive and more complex. Routing of a conveyor system across an active landfill will pose many engineering, traffic and operational challenges. Operational flexibility, necessary to respond to emergencies or undertake new diversion programs, will be impacted. Without added staffing they are concerned that some public services may be affected with diversion of more staff time to this project.

It is therefore recommended that the Board of Supervisors take the following actions:

1. Accept and file this report on the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project.

2. Complete deliberations from the March 23, 1999, and April 9, 1999, agenda on this project.

3. Make a final determination on the most appropriate location site for the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project, either the Rocha property or the Watsonville Landfill Expansion site property.

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4. If the Rocha property is determined to be the most appropriate site for the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project, direct the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to draft a letter to the California Coastal Commission acknowledging the Board's continuing approval of the Rocha site as the most feasible and least environmentally damaging alternative for the Buena Vista Landfill Soil Management Project.

Yours truly,

JOHN A. FANTHAM
Director of Public Works

RPM:mg

Attachments

RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL:

County Administrative Officer

copy to: California Coastal Commission (w/a)
Art Higaki (w/a)
Buena Vista Community Association, c/o Jonathan Wittwer (w/a)
David Koch, City of Watsonville (w/a)
County Counsel (w/a)
Fred Magaard, Public Works (w/a)
Rim Tschantz, Planning Department (w/a)
Ana Demorest, CH2M Hill (w/a)