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John Mackenzie
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Regarding the Draft EIR for the proposed Excelleron Oil Project on the Mankins Ranch in Huasna Valley.

I am writing these comments on behalf of our family. My Grandfather came to Arroyo Grande about 1908, he first worked for the Routzhan Flowerseed Company which at that time owned what later became our home ranch on Huasna Road. Through my Grandfather to my father to my brother and now with my mother June Waller as the owner of the farm, we have farmed continually on leased and owned land on Huasna Road along Arroyo Grande Creek, and at various times on leased land in the Tar Springs Creek Canyon and in Huasna Valley for 103 years. We also own and have farmed land in Cienega or lower Arroyo Grande Valley, for close to 100 years.

We have been and are concerned with any threats to farming and agriculture in San Luis Obispo County. We see the proposed industrial/oil activity in Huasna Valley as a threat to agriculture in the County.

As my mother who owns farmland both in San Luis Obispo County and Santa Barbara County recently stated,

“You don’t wreck farmland for oil”.

It would be dishonest to think of this Excelleron project as anything but a toehold for further oil exploration, yet that is how it is being sold to the County and public.

I ask you to consider what is probable if this is approved. We can look forward to oil exploration activities covering well over 10,000 acres in and around Huasna Valley, a pristine intermontane valley in the Coast Ranges.

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Huasna Valley contains a mix of residences, small farms and large ranches, its history is agricultural, its culture is agricultural.

By the County's own General Plan allowing the oil industry into the valley would violate many goals, objectives and stipulations. Some of which I quote below, this list is not complete by any means. It is obvious that the County planners have made preserving Agricultural lands and the rural character of the outlying areas of our county their prime objective.

Sentences and paragraphs taken from the County General Plan, with my comments.

“Identify those areas of the county with productive farms, ranches and soils, and establish goals, policies and implementation measures that will enable their long-term stability and productivity.”

Allowing industrial oil exploration into Huasna Valley will violate this stipulation. In the quotes below I have highlighted the particular goals, objectives or stipulations which oil exploration or production which would violate, this list is by no means complete, the picture however is crystal clear:

“In 1995, the California legislature enacted SB 275, the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program Act of 1995. The Act includes an important statement of legislative intent regarding conservation of agricultural lands, as follows:

- a. Encourage voluntary, long-term private stewardship of agricultural lands by offering landowners financial incentives.**
- b. Protect farming and ranching operations in agricultural areas from nonfarm or nonranch land uses that may hinder and curtail farming or ranching operations.**
- c. Encourage long-term conservation of productive agricultural lands in order to protect the agricultural economy of rural communities, as well as that of the state, for future generations of Californians.**
- d. Encourage local land use planning for orderly and efficient urban growth and conservation of agricultural land.**
- e. Encourage local land use planning decisions that are consistent with the state's policies with regard to agricultural land conservation.**

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f. Encourage improvements to enhance long-term sustainable agricultural uses.

San Luis Obispo County supports this important piece of legislation. It furthers the legislature's statement of legislative intent as expressed for the required Open Space Element of the general plan; it is supportive of the findings and major principles of the Food and Agriculture Code ; and also provides further support to the California Land Conservation Act (the Williamson Act). This program can make grant monies available to pursue a variety of agricultural conservation programs, including the purchase of agricultural conservation easements, land improvement and planning grants, and technical assistance from the State Department of Conservation. These funds could be used to achieve several important goals and policies found in this plan.

In preparing the maps, both natural and cultural factors were considered to determine suitable land use designations. Even though this document addresses only agricultural resources, it is recognized that agricultural and natural resources may be intertwined or overlap one another. For instance, a wooded stream corridor may serve several functions, such as recharging the groundwater basin that supports agricultural activities while at the same time controlling flooding, providing wildlife habitat, **providing scenic vistas** and affording recreational opportunities. If properly managed, these multiple uses may exist in harmony without hindering the ongoing agricultural activities or damaging the stream corridor.

While it is understood that there are many types of agriculture and many facets to the agricultural industry,
the focus of this document is on the land resource as the most important resource to the long-term protection of agriculture in San Luis Obispo County.

It is the policy of San Luis Obispo County to protect and encourage agricultural operations as stated in the county general plan and in the right-to-farm ordinance.

**** There is a finite amount of land with the necessary characteristics that will enable the production of food and fiber, the basic necessities of life.**

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**** Once agricultural land is converted to non-agricultural use, it is virtually impossible to remove the non-agricultural use and convert the land back to agricultural production.**

Retaining land resources keeps options open for future agricultural activities as the industry changes over time.

Supporting long-term productivity and sustainability of the county's farms and ranches by conserving and protecting the soil, water and air which are agriculture's basic resources.

AG3: Protect Agricultural Lands.

a. Establish criteria in this element for agricultural land divisions that will promote the long-term viability of agriculture.

b. Maintain and protect agricultural lands from inappropriate conversion to non-agricultural uses. Establish criteria in this element and corresponding changes in the Land Use Element and Land Use Ordinance for when it is appropriate to convert land from agricultural to non-agricultural designations.

c. Maintain and strengthen the county's agricultural preserve program (Williamson Act) as an effective means for long-term agricultural land preservation.

Provide incentives for landowners to maintain land in productive agricultural uses.

Special uses such as dude ranches and camps [oil and attendant industrial infrastructure] may be appropriate; however, they must be compatible with the existing rural environment [We believe oil and attendant industrial infrastructure is not compatible] and be integrated with services, access and circulation patterns."

Based on the DEIR clear statement that there were unmitigatable impacts to Huasna Valley, approving the Excelaron project, would violate the goals, objectives and stipulations of the San Luis Obispo County General Plan.

There are no benefits to the Huasna Valley community that will come from this project, Excelaron Representatives have stated as much. There are only negatives to the community.

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I asked Carol Florence of Oasis/Excelaron directly if there were any benefits to the Huasna Valley Community, she hemmed and hawed, the best she could come up with was “better emergency services”.

There are precious few benefits to San Luis Obispo County and communities. Excelaron Representatives have projected \$350,000 in tax revenue to the County. This figure could easily be offset by decline in property values in the adjacent area due to the oil project. As a percentage of annual County revenues the amount is insignificant.

There will be very few permanent jobs, the drillers and construction workers will come from out of area and return to their permanent homes once the wells are in, there will be very few permanent jobs for the project once completed.

I urge the planners and Planning Commission to carefully consider how this project will violate the County General Plan.

I urge the planners and Planning Commission to protect our rural agricultural economy and culture and deny this project.

Sincerely,

Richard G Waller