



Alameda Creek Alliance

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November 20, 2002

Carmen Borg, Urban Planner
Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP
396 Hayes Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Carmen Borg:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Initial Study for the proposed Alameda County Waste Management Authority (ACWMA) Compost Facility Development Project. As an organization concerned with the health of our environment, we commend ACWMA for expanding recycling and composting of organic materials which would otherwise end up in the waste stream. We also appreciate the preparation of an EIR by the ACWMA, to identify the potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures for the project.

The Alameda Creek Alliance (ACA) is a non-profit community watershed group working to protect and restore the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed. We have an interest in restoring steelhead trout and salmon to Alameda Creek and protecting habitat for native species. We have over 1,200 members and supporters within the Alameda Creek watershed.

Andrade Road Facility

Sheridan Creek, a tributary of Alameda Creek, runs to the northwest of the proposed Andrade Road site. It is unknown whether Sheridan Creek has suitable habitat for native rainbow/steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), but other tributaries to Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley upstream of the project site, such as Pirate Creek and Welch Creek support small populations of native trout in their lower reaches (Nielsen and Fountain 1999; Gunther et al. 2000).¹ We are particularly concerned that the facility is designed to avoid impacting surface water quality or quantity in Sheridan and Alameda Creek.

The Initial Study for the project identifies the potential for the federally threatened California red-legged frog and the federal candidate species California tiger salamander to occur on the Andrade

¹ Nielsen, J. L., and M. C. Fountain. 1999. Microsatellite analyses of Alameda Creek rainbow/steelhead trout. Report submitted to Applied Marine Sciences, Inc. USGS, Biological Resources Division, Anchorage, AK.

Gunther, A. J., J. Hagar, and P. Salop. 2000. An assessment of the potential for restoring a viable steelhead trout population in the Alameda Creek watershed. Prepared for the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup. Applied Marine Sciences, Inc. and Hagar Environmental Services.

Road site. The red-legged frog is known to occur in Alameda Creek in the upper Sunol Valley, upstream of the proposed project. The tiger salamander is also known to occur in the Sunol Valley. Please consult the California Natural Diversity Database, maintained by the California Department of Fish and Game, for documentation.

The survey protocols published by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for determining the presence of both of these amphibians should be conducted. If either species is present on the site, avoidance measures should be taken to ensure persistence of the species on-site. These measures would include avoiding direct impacts to breeding habitat and preservation of adequate migration corridors between breeding habitat and uplands estivation habitat.

The potential indirect impacts of the proposed facility on frog and salamander populations in the Sunol Valley should be analyzed in the EIR. A compost facility with organic waste has the potential to attract species such as raccoons, skunks, and opossums, all of which are potential predators of frogs and salamanders. Measures should be taken to ensure that the facility does not attract or artificially elevate local populations of these predators.

The Initial Study identifies the potential for the western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*), a state species of concern, to occur on the Andrade Road site. The survey protocols published by the California Department of Fish and Game for determining the presence of the burrowing owl should be conducted. If burrowing owls are located, avoidance measures should be taken to ensure persistence of the species on-site. The potential indirect impacts of the proposed facility on burrowing owls through attraction or artificial elevation of local populations of known predators of burrowing owls such as skunks, foxes, raccoons, and crows should then be analyzed and mitigated.

Altamont Landfill Facility

There have been numerous recent sightings of breeding western burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*), a state species of concern, in the vicinity of the proposed Waste Management facility at the Altamont Landfill. Breeding owls have been observed around Bethany Reservoir, Midway, Patterson Pass, and Lawrence Radiation Lab. Please consult the California Natural Diversity Database, maintained by the California Department of Fish and Game, for these sightings. The burrowing owl is also known to occur at the Brushy Peak land owned by the Livermore Area Regional Park District, according to wildlife inventory surveys conducted by the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD 1998).² The potential direct and indirect impacts of the proposed facility on the burrowing owl, including loss of nesting and foraging habitat and attraction of known predators of the owl, should be analyzed during the EIR process and appropriate mitigations developed.

The California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*), a federally threatened species, and the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*), a federal candidate species, are known to occur at Brushy Peak, just west of the proposed project site (EBRPD 1998). These species have the potential to occur at the proposed Altamont Landfill site.

² East Bay Regional Park District. 1998. EBRPD threatened and endangered species data. Unpublished survey information provided by Joe DiDonato, Wildlife Department, EBRPD.

Several raptors which are state species of concern, such as the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), and white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), as well as other regionally significant birds such as the ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, and loggerhead shrike are known to occur at Brushy Peak, just west of the proposed project site (EBRPD 1998).

A small number of Alameda whipsnakes (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*) have been found in the 1980s and 1990s along Vasco Road and in Morgan Territory, west of the proposed project site, and along Mines Road, south of the proposed project site (McGinnis 1992).³ The proposed Altamont landfill site should be surveyed for whipsnakes according to protocols published by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and an assessment of suitable whipsnake habitat on-site should be done.

Sincerely,

Jeff Miller
Director, ACA

³ McGinnis, S. M. 1992. Habitat requirements, distribution, and current status of the Alameda whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*). Prepared for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento, CA.