

June 7, 2020

San Mateo County Planning Commission

planning-commission@smcgov.org

mschaller@smcgov.org

RE: Vegetation Assessment of MidPen Housing Cypress Point Project Site
and California red-legged frog site adjacent to Montara Creek

Dear Commissioners and Mr. Schaller,

I write regarding the proposed Cypress Point project in Moss Beach.

I'm a professional forager, naturalist, and a plant and mushroom identification expert. I live in Montara, so I'm especially familiar with the plant communities of this area. I hike frequently, and identify plants on these walks. In 2015, I devoted myself to brokering and promoting wild foods full-time. I operate Morchella Wild Foods of California.

California's coastal fog belt is the most biodiverse part of our state, a narrow band of habitat that occurs only where summer fog brings moisture to the flora during otherwise dry months. The year-round moisture and mild temperatures result in thick vegetation, rich soil and a deep seed bank. Coastal forests here are comprised of Monterey pine and Monterey cypress, trees native to California and designated vulnerable/endangered by IUCN and the California Native Plant Society due to their small native ranges and susceptibility to disease and climate shifts. These forests are host to many native plant and mushroom communities.

The purpose of this letter is a concern I have with the planned development at Cypress Point. I attended the Planning Commission hearing in Half Moon Bay on January 22, 2020, where I was disappointed to hear the flora on the Cypress Point site described as "invasive grasslands," when it is in fact native forest. After the hearing I read MidPen's May 24, 2018 "Biological Resources Assessment," section Vegetation and found that this Assessment only discussed a fraction of the native vegetation I've observed on the project site and surrounding area. Even some of the most prominent plants were omitted from the list of species recorded during MidPen's survey in March 2017.

Some of the resources and reference guides I used in preparing this correspondence include:

Calflora database (<https://www.calflora.org/>)

iNaturalist database (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>)

Tending the Wild by Kat Anderson

California Foraging by Judith Lowry

California Native Plants for the Garden, by Carol Bornstein, David Fross, and Bart

O'Brien

Mushrooms of the Redwood Coast by Noah Siegel and Christian Schwarz

Mushrooms Demystified by David Arora

Attached is a map of the project site and surrounding area with points of interest labeled 1-11 where I've observed native flora, and below I identify the plants I've observed in each specific area

- 1) A native plant community of coyote brush, beach and wood strawberry, yerba buena, yarrow, California mugwort, little western bittercress, oso berry, California bee plant, California everlasting, and coast angelica.
- 2) Mugwort, yerba buena, California bee plant, poison oak and coyote brush along northern edge of site.
- 3) Abundant mycorrhizal mushrooms occurring with Monterey pine here: *Amanita muscaria*, *Lactarius deliciosus*, *Suillus* spp., *Boletus edulis*, *Russula queletii*, and others.
- 4) Pacific aster, California coffeeberry, and Pacific sanicle are found throughout the site including here.
- 5) Beach sagewort.
- 6) Monterey cypress here host many native mushrooms including *Agaricus bernardii*, *Agaricus brunneofibrillosus*, *Clitocybe nuda*, and others.
- 7) Yarrow is found throughout the site, and in abundance here.
- 8) Coffeeberry, coyote brush, beach strawberry, Douglas iris, and checkerbloom can be found in the median between Carlos and Cabrillo Highway. In the Calflora database, there is an observation of rose leptosiphon, California Rare Plant (Rank 1B.1) being found at this location. A small and solitary plant, it would be difficult to find except when in bloom during a short period in May and June.
- 9) Pink honeysuckle and salt-loving agaricus mushrooms.
- 10) Watercress presence in Montara Creek is evidence of aquatic habitat which likely hosts red-legged frogs.
- 11) Single leaf onion, red flowering currant, red elderberry, arroyo willow and more can be found nearby in Montara Creek.

Of the many native plants omitted from MidPen's Biological Assessment, the most puzzling to me are the omission of California coffeeberry, yarrow, Pacific aster, Pacific sanicle, and California bee plant - because they are some of the most prominent vegetation throughout the site.

In addition, please consider that on April 12, 2020 I observed what I believe was a California red-legged frog adjacent to Montara Creek. The frog was on 14th Street, at the edge of the road, in a perennially wet spot created by a neighbor's groundwater drainage. I observed the frog about 100 yards north of Montara Creek. I understand that at this time of year this species roams from their aquatic breeding spots to upland areas during rainy periods like we had in early April this year. I have attached an image of the frog I observed. Although I am not an expert in herpetology, I understand that the prominent dorsolateral folds on the frog I observed are a key feature that distinguish California red-legged frogs from more common Pacific tree frogs. California red-legged frogs are our state amphibian, and designated a vulnerable species by IUCN due to habitat loss.

In conclusion, MidPen's Vegetation Assessment is clearly incomplete and understates the native flora that would be impacted by development here.

I urge you to postpone further consideration of this proposed project - until more a reliable biological assessment has been performed.

Sincerely,

Bryan Jessop



