

Sierra Club Lake Group

15995 Lucy Circle, Lower Lake, CA 95457

November 9, 2005
Penelope Shibley, Senior Planner
Community Development, Planning Division
255 N. Forbes St.
Lakeport, CA 95453

RE: Heron's Landing

Dear Ms. Shibley:

The thoroughness and competence of the environmental information provided by these developers (through the means of Ruzicka Associates) is most impressive, as is their sensitivity to the special needs of what is evidently a very special site. Nonetheless, the Lake Group has serious reservations about the proposed subdivision, and recommends major revisions if it is to be permitted.

Our specific concerns center on the site's value as wildlife habitat, and in particular on the heron and cormorant rookeries found there. Although the developers propose, at what is undoubtedly a major expense, to withhold from sale the four lots lying wholly or partially within 150 feet of the rookery, and to impose significant seasonal construction restrictions on an additional six lots, these limitations will cease with the departure of the nesting birds, which we predict will occur in short order. Reeves Point Drive itself would slice through the very sensitive 150-foot zone, and a substantial proportion of that street (about a third of it) lies within the 400-foot zone. Automobile traffic so close to the nests is certain to be disruptive, during construction and afterwards, as residents access the common recreational area at the end of the peninsula and their boats at the marina. The marina siting poses additional problems, since it too seems to lie within, though barely within, the 400-foot line. The hubbub of boaters coming and going, and -- worse -- the inevitable noise from outboard and inboard motors, will also disturb the birds.

Despite all proposed mitigations, approval of this subdivision will very probably lead to the abandonment of the rookeries, then after another three years to the removal of any bird-related restrictions on Heron's Landing lots, and thus to the permanent loss of what is now prime heron and cormorant habitat. From an environmental perspective we think this outcome deplorable.

We are also concerned about the degradation of any remaining fragment of Clear Lake's once extensive wetlands, about the wisdom of constructing houses in the flood plain despite the proposed elevation of their floor levels, and about the desirability of allowing new subdivisions in an area outside the urban growth limits specified in the new draft general plan.

This property would make a wonderful mini-park, preserved for its habitat value and for public low-impact recreational uses such as bird watching and kayaking, but alas land values probably preclude such a destiny. If the site is approved for subdivision, we recommend that Lots 10 through 19 be withdrawn and merged with the common area at the end of the peninsula, with no motorized access. We also recommend that the marina be resited to the east side of the peninsula, opposite the nesting area. If economic viability then necessitates that lot sizes be reduced in order to create extra saleable parcels within the restricted space, that outcome would be preferable to the permanent loss of irreplaceable shoreline habitat for wildlife.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Brandon

Sierra Club Lake Group Chair