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Tuesday, April 17, 2007

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Dear friend and supporter of the Laguna Foundation:

As you have probably seen, the *Press Democrat* recently reported that the Laguna Foundation supports the casino resort under development by the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria. As often happens, this news story oversimplified the Foundation's position, and we wanted to let our supporters know exactly where we stand in relation to this project.

The Foundation collaborates with the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria in many ways. We share a vision of restoring and celebrating the Laguna as a community resource, and the Tribe has actively participated in informing and investing in our Education Program and Laguna Learning Center project. This collaboration predates the casino project and the Tribe's Congressional reinstatement in 2000. It has developed through our recognition of the important role of the Laguna in the Tribe's long history, and that we share common values surrounding it. The Tribe has repeatedly expressed to us its commitment to restoring its ancestral lands throughout the Laguna in partnership with the Foundation.

With that being said, we are an independent organization and our relationship with the Tribe rests in the understanding that each of us must say and do what is right to us. We have been careful in our dealings with the FIGR to be clear that our analysis of their project will be based on our understanding of its likely impacts on the Laguna's ecological health and they have welcomed our suggestions for inclusions and improvements in their design throughout their planning process. We have generally avoided social impacts of a casino in our analysis of the project, as that falls outside our mission.

The Foundation views the Tribe's willingness to do a full and thorough Environmental Impact Statement—which they were not required to do—as a demonstration of its commitment to engage the community and address its concerns. In response to requests made by us and other environmental organizations early in the project's planning, the project is now located inside a voter-approved Urban Growth Boundary on land which will be developed under any conditions, according to Rohnert Park's General Plan. Its design contains extensive green building elements that make it a model project for alternative energy use and efficiency, and water catchment, infiltration and re-use. These and other provisions, especially in the enhancement of wetlands, go far beyond the mitigation measures typically incorporated into such projects and which would typify the alternative commercial development on the site. Our comments at the recent public hearing also included requests that they pursue alternatives for wastewater that would not include treatment on site and local discharge, and for water supply that they would not drill their own wells on site.

The Laguna Foundation is a practical, collaborative, problem-solving organization, and we have tried to be realistic in approaching this complex issue. Given the Tribe's Congressional authorization and sovereign authority, as well as California law, the casino will be built somewhere and our approach has tried to influence its sitting and design to ensure that its direct impacts on the Laguna are minimized, and to continue to engage and partner with the Tribe in pursuing shared goals that lead to greater positive changes in the larger context of the Laguna's future.

We appreciate your support and participation in our work, and hope we can count on your continued support and involvement.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Schurman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dan Schurman  
Executive Director