

Santa Cruz/Monterey

UCSC chancellor OKs Great Meadow road

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By Paul Rogers
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Chancellor Robert Stevens of the University of California, Santa Cruz announced Tuesday he has approved construction of a controversial new road across the rural campus's Great Meadow.

Stevens called his decision to proceed with the \$2.7 million Meyer Drive extension an "integral part" of UCSC's long-range expansion plan to increase enrollment 50 percent by the year 2005.

The announcement, however, was met with sharp criticism from students and elected officials who have labeled it a waste of tax money and an environmental threat.

"This is a terribly mistaken decision," said Santa Cruz County Supervisor Gary

Patton. "It essentially desecrates the university's own front yard."

Campus planners have said the road — which would extend Meyer Drive half a mile east to Hagar Drive by bisecting one of Santa Cruz County's most prominent open spaces — will reduce auto congestion and allow easier campus access for town residents.

Opponents charge it will merely shift traffic jams to other intersections, blight views of the ocean and destroy the 140-acre habitat of deer and predatory birds.

Other critics have worried it will lead to significant future development of the meadow, as well as emphasize auto use over alternative transportation such as bicycles.

"I am immensely conscious of the im-

port of the project on the environment," Stevens said. "And I have taken these concerns very seriously. But I am satisfied . . . that the importance of the road outweighs any impacts to the environment."

Several prominent leaders who founded UCSC in the early 1960s recently had voiced concerns about the Meyer Drive Extension, including former Gov. Edmund G. "Pat" Brown and UCSC's original master-plan architect, John Warnecke of San Francisco.

During a public comment period on the project's environmental impact report last month, both Brown and Warnecke wrote letters to UCSC claiming the road violated the campus framers' original desire to leave the meadow as undeveloped open space.

The university received 69 letters on the subject, according to UCSC spokesman Jim Burns. Of those, 64 were against it.

Stevens said Tuesday that he read them all.

He stressed, however, that if the campus is to grow from the current enrollment of 9,500 to 15,000 by the turn of the century, as envisioned in the 1988 long-range development plan, he had "no choice" but to approve the road.

That a central campus architect and a former governor who spearheaded the creation of UCSC did not agree with his assessment is immaterial, Stevens said.

"I'm mystified by that, you know," he said. "There's a good deal of rewriting of history going on. Time has played funny tricks with their recollections."

Stevens said the road has been included on every long-range campus plan since 1963.

He approved the project's environmental impact report late Monday. UCSC budget analysts will request construction funding as part of their 1992-'93 budget package.

Ground probably would be broken in the fall of 1992, with completion estimated within about eight months.

According to most observers, opponents now have two options: suing UCSC to block the project, and taking the fight to state legislators who will be asked by the university for construction funding.

"We don't consider this over by any means," said senior Ben Fiedler, who led student protests against the road this spring.