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Supervisors Approve Bonny Doon Vineyard Project

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A large tract of rural Bonny Doon mountain land can be plowed into vineyards, the county Board of Supervisors unanimously decided Tuesday afternoon.

The board's decision resolved at the local level a modern-day land use conflict between high priority agriculture and preservation of land in its natural state.

The decision gives Jim Beauregard the local go-ahead to use up to 300 acres of a 525-acre land holding for what will be the county's largest vineyard. It also gives him advanced board approval for 10 houses if he can manage to combine the 11 parcels that make up the 525 acres into one parcel.

On the other hand, Beauregard must preserve and protect a number of areas that grow the Santa Cruz Cypress, Ponderosa Pine, and Ben Lomond and Santa Cruz Wallflowers.

Prior to doing anything, Beauregard must first get state Coastal Commission approval for the project in the Martin and Pine Flat roads area of Bonny Doon.

Supervisors' Chairman Gary Patton, the man on the spot since he is an avowed environmentalist and the vineyard is in his district, called the Beauregard project "the most vexing and difficult application" the board has had in recent years.

The regional Sierra Club offered strong opposition to the large scale of the vineyard (it will triple the amount of vineyard acreage in the county) and as one observer put it, "The Sierra Club went to the Wallflower on this one."

The Wallflower took center stage at the board's hearing on April 28 when it was discovered just a few days before the hearing that someone had plowed up about half the Ben Lomond Wallflowers at the site.

It was disclosed that Gard Hellenthal, a former resident on the property, had

done the plowing and he told The Sentinel that he acted on his own. Both Beauregard and the present land owners, Teachers Management Investment Co., said they had nothing to do with the destruction of the rare and endangered plants.

Hellenthal's action led to supervisors' attorneys drawing up an ordinance that when approved will make it a misdemeanor to knowingly destroy a rare and endangered species and that such actions could be grounds for denial of a project.

Testimony has indicated the vineyard operation will cost Beauregard \$10 million during the next decade and that in that time, he will operate \$1 million in the hole. It is estimated that it will take 15 years for it to become a paying operation.

A number of persons testified that the Santa Cruz Mountains are prime grape-growing lands, and that while the quantity is low, the quality of the grape is

comparable to some of the finer vineyard areas of Europe.

Some say this county could become a famous vineyard area.

The project includes the logging of from 75,000 to 100,000 board feet of pine in areas that will have to be clear-cut to make way for the grapes. It also includes a program that will allow the state Fish and Game Department to attempt to transplant the Wallflowers in other areas.

As Patton spoke of the importance of the project, Live Oak Supervisor Dan Forbus told him he was not alone.

"I just came off a vexing situation," Forbus said. "It was called the 'O'Neill Ranch'."

Forbus said the former board's approval of the O'Neill Ranch project in Soquel that could provide from 120 to 140 low-cost senior units to the county's housing "was a compromise decision to

provide one of the necessities of life — housing — and it left a lot of animosity."

Patton pleaded with the audience to heal the wounds of the agriculture versus natural habitat fight that has surrounded the Beauregard project.

"I don't feel the applicant has been mistreated by the county in its efforts to preserve the physical and biological integrity of the environment," Patton said.

He added, "The people who have spoken for the environment — the amazing and complex environment that God has given us — have spoken truly and deserve our thanks, not our condemnation."

Beauregard said he will have to work it out with TMI to get approval for the merging of the 11 lots and for designation of the protected areas. He said it will be five years before he can pay off the mortgage and be able to make such decisions on his own.

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