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Lawrence Halprin & Associates Statement on Concepts, Ideas & Objectives
in Planning for the Sea Ranch

For: Marion Conrad, copies to Al Roeke, Don O'Leary

In deciding how best to develop such a unique and large section of the Pacific Coast, the main objective from the start has been to preserve that which is valuable ecologically, so as to make the property more liveable without destroying its beauty. You might call this a policy of "dynamic conservation": the development for human use and enjoyment of a piece of property without losing those values which make it desirable in the first place. There were many factors involved in carrying out this central idea.

First of all, it was decided to orient the building sites around the existing cypress windrows, which run at right angles to the coast and which are very prominent features in the landscape. By allowing building only along these windrows, the views of all residents of the ocean is preserved, and much of the cliff-side is kept open for the use and enjoyment of all. The usual approach, that of lining up sites in tiers parallel to the cliffs, would in effect block all long views from above and from all but the first row below, and would give a very cluttered and suburban feeling to the final development. It was also decided to leave as much area as possible in common open space, secured by very carefully worked out deed restrictions. These are mainly aimed at preserving the native landscape as much intact as possible, and allowing only the introduction of plant species which are native to this area and climate.

We also planned so as to achieve a variety of residential sites for divergent interests and incomes. There are lots located in the upland woods, in open fields, along ocean terrace windrows, around specific terrain features, and also condominium apartments. Some people will come hereto rest, some to retire, some for active sporting weekends, some for all these and other reasons, and we attempted to have each find what he sought. There will be some areas set aside for active, organized recreation, such as riding, swimming, golfing, tennis, flying, and many other areas left for individual quirks such as fishing, bird-watching, walking, rock collecting, small farming operation, and others. To each his own.

A word about the climate. We felt from the start that its very severity was an asset. People who come from urban environments, as nearly all of us do, want to feel the wind and the salt spray and the warmth and the cold. But we also need protection from the elements, and to be able to retreat from them at times. We studied the wind and weather patterns in great detail, and tried to provide for increased protection in the form of new plantings, extending and thickening existing windrows, locating many building sites in wind shadows formed by these trees and by existing terrain variations. We also recommended how to thin out dense forest areas so as to provide sheltered, sunny building sites in the upland woods, and where to plant new trees so as to create future windbreaks and warm areas. And having said all this about the climate, we also learned that the weather is actually much better locally than elsewhere on the coast, that this stretch of the coast is truly a "banana belt", facing somewhat south, quite free of fog, generally warmer and clearer than a few miles further north or south.

We feel that the Sea Ranch is a unique area, and that it can be improved for human use without destroying its beauty, and that our recommendations will actually help to enhance that which nature has already so abundantly provided. Man has always been part of the ecological system, at least for the past few thousand years, and his re-introduction upon this land simply involves a re-adjustment of processes which have been going on for years. An example of this is the practice of controlled burning of forest and grasslands ground cover, which the Indians performed upon this land many times in the past. This was a means of enriching the soil, germinating seeds, removing dead material. We are re-introducing this process now, because it makes sense, and because it is part of the life cycle that has always existed and that is vital to natural processes.

In summary, we think that the concepts we have recommended will make the Sea Ranch more beautiful, more useable, more desirable than it already is in its present state.

