



Photograph: Martin Dreiling

Wickersham Road News

June 1, 2004

Greetings

Happy really belated New Year. I must offer my personal apologies for not presenting a newsletter sooner. I can only say that my year has been busier than I could have imagined.

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Gate Combinations

The gate combinations will change on Monday, August 2, 2004. The new combinations will be as follows:

Front Gate:
Big Iron Gate:

Please make a note.

This change is intended to occur before the start of deer season, many vendors and guests have the combination over the summer and we are hoping to reduce the number of “un-intended” visitors.

Recent Road Work

Most of you have seen or heard about the work that took place on the first mile of the road. This work included extensive grading and surface work on the road by the Owner's of the front ranch. This was not Road Association Work.

The result is a very smooth road with aggressive drainage that should perform well in winter.

The Road Association did perform work on the remaining length of road on the front ranch using the vendor that performed the work on the first mile. This resulted in cost effective work for the Association as the vendor was already mobilized.

Work for the Association was limited to "Comfort Grading" to make the drive somewhat smoother for the summer and to address some specific surface drainage problems.

We will be performing similar work on limited portions of the remaining road from the second gate to the mid-point of Snot Hill over the next month.

We are intending to assemble a larger project prior to winter to rock portions of Snot Hill and stabilize some of the remaining washouts from December 2002. This is pending available resources.

Front Gate

As everyone is aware, the front gate has been operational for some time. Structural changes were made to the foundations by Dean Falkenburg and friends. This has resulted in excellent performance and the gate has not settled noticeably since the work was performed.

There remains apparent difficulty in maintaining the locks and keeping the gate locked. We are asking all users to remember that the gate shall remain locked at all times.

This is not only part of our Road Agreement but our neighbors have asked us to please keep the gate locked. As they have much more public exposure from the County Road, it seems fair that we should respect their requests.

Please advise all of your guests and vendors to lock the gate and remind them that the numbers on the lock need to be turned before the lock will lock.

If you wish to leave the gate open for a car that may be following, please wait at the gate while it is open.

The Road Committee is responsible for maintaining locks and we have been replacing locks (or reimbursing Dean) whenever they are damaged or removed. This is costing the Association real dollars. Any help in keeping the gates lock will mean more dollars for actual road surface maintenance.

For those who do keep the gate locked, thanks from the Committee and from the owners at the front ranches.

As an added note, there have been numerous requests to place a key lock on the front gate that is usable by the Association.

Road Policy Proposal

Three fellow Owners are proposing the following policy. This proposal is being presented at the request of those Owners. It has not been proposed by the Road Committee. We will send ballots out under separate cover.

"A proposal for the approval or disapproval of Wickersham Land Owners;

That the Wickersham Road Association obtain a valid General Engineering Contractors License number, and the appropriate insurance to protect the property owners at Wickersham Ranch, before hiring out any vendor for road work, except for minor jobs of less than \$600. “

Submitted by:

Doug Porter, #14

Earl Farnsworth, #7

Heinz Moser, #20

Background

Per California Law,

CALIFORNIA CODES BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS CODE

"Contractor" Defined

7026. "Contractor," for the purposes of this chapter, is synonymous with "builder" and, within the meaning of this chapter, a contractor is any person, who undertakes to or offers to undertake to, or purports to have the capacity to undertake to, or submits a bid to, or does himself or herself or by or through others, construct, alter, repair, add to, subtract from, improve, move, wreck or demolish any building, highway, road, parking facility, railroad, excavation or other structure, project, development or improvement, or to do any part thereof, including the erection of scaffolding or other structures or works in connection therewith, or the cleaning of grounds or structures in connection therewith, or the preparation and removal of roadway construction zones, lane closures, flagging, or traffic diversions, or the installation, repair, maintenance, or calibration of monitoring equipment for underground storage tanks, and whether or not the performance of work herein described involves the addition to, or fabrication into, any structure, project, development or improvement herein described of any material or article of merchandise. "Contractor" includes subcontractor and specialty contractor. "Roadway" includes, but is not limited to, public or city streets, highways, or any public conveyance.

(Amended by Stats. 1999, Chapter 708 (AB 1206); Stats. 2001, Chapter 728 (SB 724).)

Classification

7055. For the purpose of classification, the contracting business includes any or all of the following branches:

- (a) General engineering contracting.
- (b) General building contracting.
- (c) Specialty contracting.

General Engineering Contractor

7056. A general engineering contractor is a contractor whose principal contracting business is in connection with fixed works requiring specialized engineering knowledge and skill, including the following divisions or subjects: irrigation, drainage, water power, water supply, flood control, inland waterways, harbors, docks and wharves, shipyards and ports, dams and hydroelectric projects, levees, river control and reclamation works, railroads, highways, streets and roads, tunnels, airports and airways, sewers and sewage disposal plants and systems, waste reduction

plants, bridges, overpasses, underpasses and other similar works, pipelines and other systems for the transmission of petroleum and other liquid or gaseous substances, parks, playgrounds and other recreational works, refineries, chemical plants and similar industrial plants requiring specialized engineering knowledge and skill, powerhouses, power plants and other utility plants and installations, mines and metallurgical plants, land leveling and earthmoving projects, excavating, grading, trenching, paving and surfacing work and cement and concrete works in connection with the above mentioned fixed works.

We will prepare a ballot for mailing next month for consideration of the membership. In the meantime we encourage discussion of this matter among all Owners.

Please note also that the vendor for this years work did possess a License for landscape related grading and has provided an insurance certificate to the Association.

Dues Due

For those who have not already sent in their annual Maintenance dues, now is the time. This year's dues remain at \$300.00 per parcel. Please remit per the enclosed invoice.

There are several Owners who have not paid dues for several years. Unfortunately this causes an increased burden on the remaining neighbors as the costs to maintain the road do not go away or wait for us to collect money.

In the past, the Road Committee has published the names of those who are past due in the newsletter. We have resisted this as it seems somewhat un-neighborly. However, failure to support the cost of keeping our road open and usable is also un-neighborly.

For that reason we will be publishing the names of those Owners who are seriously past due in the next news letter so that those who do pay their dues can express their concerns to those who do not.

We realize that there are two potential reasons for non-payment related to the properties in question.

Non-Use

The first is non-use: Persons who do not use the road feel that there is no obligation to support the maintenance of that road.

While this may seem logical on the surface, the maintenance of the road and its functionality is directly related to the property value of all parcels served. Even those users who do not visit

the ranch, or who use alternate means of access, receive value from a well maintained road in terms of increased property value. This is the basis for most public assessments.

And while we might think that that value is only recovered when we sell a property, the road must receive annual, ongoing maintenance and care so that it is also there when that property is sold.

Dissatisfaction with the Road Committee

The other reason stated for non-payment (and potential non-payment) is dissatisfaction with the Road Committee's past choices in selection of Contractors.

While this is certainly a legitimate debate (as indicated below) it should not be connected to payment of Road Dues.

Failure to pay due to differences of opinion regarding Road policy simply places a greater burden on the rest of the Owners.

And finally, to all of those who do pay dues and support the ongoing care of the road, thank you from the Committee and from the rest of the neighbors who enjoy the benefits of a usable (though rustic) road.

Road Maintenance Costs

Due to the increased awareness and scrutiny regarding environmental issues in the Gualala Watershed, we are faced with escalating responsibility as land owners to ensure that environmental degradation does not occur as a result of our actions.

While each of us makes our own decisions regarding the ways in which we use our land, we are increasingly made aware of the effects of our actions on the lands around us.

This is explicitly true when it comes to roads and particularly so when dealing with a road that crosses numerous property lines and runs in close proximity to critical watercourses.

Additionally, increased enforcement of existing environmental regulations has caught the attention of many in Sonoma County, some very nearby the Wickersham.

For these reasons coupled with our own sense of responsibility to the land we enjoy, our road maintenance strategies must change to encompass more evolved methods for maintaining the integrity of the road.

Over the last year we have been compiling (slowly) a road maintenance strategy that assesses numerous long-term requirements for the durability, serviceability of the road and drainage system

As we experienced two years ago when we replaced several aging culverts, our annual resources, when used conservatively, can generate a minimal capital project every two years if we have favorable weather and reduced regular maintenance.

The culvert project and related road surface work used approximately \$12,000 against an annual revenue of approximately \$9,000 (based on non-payment by some owners). While this was an efficient and sensible project, it represents a fraction of the overall culvert and

drainage work that is necessary to make the road more durable and friendlier to the environment.

Additionally a \$12,000 project is not necessarily efficient as a capital project, particularly for the kinds of work required for long term maintenance needs. And, at our current level of revenue, we cannot count on reduced regular maintenance at all times. Our typical winters can easily absorb most of our annual revenue in non-productive maintenance.

For this reason we should begin considering an increase in road dues to bring the revenue level to a point commensurate with the actual regular maintenance requirements as well as able to generate long term maintenance resources.

We hope to publish a draft master plan of the road by the end of summer to help demonstrate the magnitude and content of the long-term maintenance needs.

In general, over the next 10 years, we need to:

- replace approximately 2/3 of the 83 culverts
- rock the equivalent of the entire road at least once (accounting for re-rocking on difficult slopes)
- Out slope (or otherwise affect surface gradient) approximately 5 miles of the 14 mile road
- Add several additional culverts at critical locations
- Make substantial bridge improvements
- Perform substantial drainage management in the proximity of Toombs Creek
- Possible creation of a water source for road maintenance purposes.

If we are to fund these kinds of projects over an extended time period, and remain able to deal with severe winters and unplanned road damage, we should see road dues double at some time in the next two years.

As an alternate, we could seek financial support for road improvements through grants from governmental agencies. Many associations are doing just this.

The caution here is two-fold: First, a regulated project that has government funding can easily escalate in scope and restrictions to the point that our primary goals are lost in a mire of bureaucratic red tape. As someone who almost exclusively designs and builds government funded projects, I can validate that concern.

Additionally, government grants require a higher level of organization among the owners of multiple parcels. This may imply incorporation of the Association so that it has authority outside the bounds of the ranch.

In consideration of our current dues and appropriate dues levels, we should recall that our

\$300 per year maintains approximately 14 miles of road to a primitive level with little ability to plan genuine capital projects.

As we have stated before, that works out to the cost of one lunch per mile of road for the entire year.

We would hope that the membership would consider the benefits offered by a more durable road in reducing some of the long-term maintenance costs. It is our opinion that we will be required in the very near term to perform some of the improvements that we are considering in the master plan. We should begin preparing for this now.

This is an issue we would like to consider further in the next newsletter.

Fire Season

We are clearly approaching the fire season this year and we have not had late rains as we did last year.

We are urging everyone to be cautious and to educate your guests who may be unfamiliar with the fire risk out here.

Please ask all guests not to smoke while driving along the road and to be extra cautious handling fire of any sort while at the ranch.

Fire safety at the ranch may be second nature to us, but to people not used to the landscape; it may be a very obscure subject.

Resources

Ranch Mailbox

wranch@cssanf.com

Thanks to Tami Bobb for her efforts in sharing space on her personal ranch site for our benefit.

Ranch Website

["http://www.wickershamranch.com"](http://www.wickershamranch.com)