

# CHOOSING A SITE FOR CEPEC

by Wanda Smith

In the early concept stage of California Equestrian Park and Event Center (CEPEC) in the spring of 2009, there were many discussions about location requirements for a large equestrian facility. The discussion led to investigating features of large equestrian facilities across the United States and asking people where they thought the facility should be located. Based on the finding of this investigation, initial specifications for CEPEC facilities and location were created. The location criteria included: a minimum amount of land, proximity to a major highway/corridor, distance from surrounding counties, water availability and quality, climate, soil type, stability, and drainage, terrain variation, flooding, fire danger, earthquake risk, noise, and endangered species habitat.

Research of equestrian centers with similar facilities and functionality to CEPEC, showed that they had a minimum of 1,000 acres. For example, the Kentucky Horse Park occupies 1,200 acres, the Georgia International Horse Park has 1,400 acres, and Morven Park (in Virginia) contains 1,000 acres. The land requirement for CEPEC was set at a minimum of 1,000 acres.

Distance from a major highway was an important criterion since most people don't like to travel too far from a major highway to get to an event facility, especially pulling horse trailers. Thus, a location near, but not directly adjacent to Highway 101, was set as a priority to allow convenient access but not cause traffic congestion on the highway. Additionally, it was desirable to choose a central location for CEPEC that would be easily accessible by the residents of surrounding counties such as Mendocino, Lake, Napa, and Marin. Each of these counties has a large horse and equestrian population with no large equestrian facilities like CEPEC.

Water is a major requirement for any horse facility, especially one of the size projected for CEPEC. Horses drink an average of 10-12 gallons of water a day in cool weather and up to 20-25 gallons a day in hot, dry weather. Water will also be required for human use, bathing horses, dust control and some irrigation. A regional horse show with 500 horses would require at least 5,000 gallons a day in cool weather and possibly as much as 12,500 gallons a day in hot weather. If an event was a cutting show of 500 entries, water requirements would at least double because of the cattle involved in the event. Any location identified for CEPEC needed to thus have a consistently abundant supply of water. Water quality was also an important criterion because of its consumption by both horses as well as humans. Salinity in ground water close to the bay and chemicals from run off from vineyards as well as seasonal spraying reduced the desirability of these areas.

Although Sonoma County has a generally temperate climate, it has several micro climates that vary from very wet and cold in the winter to very hot in the summer. Having a facility in a micro climate with moderate heat in the summer with cooling breezes in the afternoon, and in a valley protected from severe frost was considered ideal.

Drainage was also considered an important factor particularly during the rainy season and depends on the type of soil and terrain. A location that provided permeable soil with terrain that encouraged good drainage was desired. Soil type was considered important not only for drainage, but also for footing and stability. A location with sandy soil was considered most preferable for arena footing and a higher composite soil for trails. The stability of the soil was also important to minimize landslides and land movement during earthquakes.

The variation of the terrain was important because of the building requirements for an abundant amount of relatively flat land, as well as a slight incline, rolling hills, and steeper terrain for the different types of riding events, conditioning and trails.

An additional important requirement was that the location be located outside Sonoma County's many flood zones, and high fire risk zones from the county's forested areas. Since much of the County is in "earthquake country", one the criterion was that the location be not on a high risk quake fault. Another desired feature of an acceptable location was that the area would be relatively quiet to allow event announcements to be easily heard by riders and spectators; this requirement eliminated locations immediately adjacent to major highways and airports. Lastly, having a location that not considered a habitat for endangered species was considered important.

To find potential sites that could best accommodate these criteria, an analysis was conducted of available undeveloped land, aerial views, topography, hydrology, wetlands, earthquake faults, as well as flood, fire, and endangered species zones. The study resulted in identifying seven locations that met many of the criteria. The property that met the most criteria is in the unincorporated area of Northwest Petaluma, off Stony Point Road, between Roblar and Meacham Roads. It is a few minutes from Highway 101, but sufficiently close to allow easy access from the freeway. The location has several possibilities for entrances and exits thus minimizing traffic congestion. The property is a composite of several parcels with the potential of 1,400 acres; it has a variety of terrain from gently rolling to steeper hills of up to 650 feet high. The lower terrain consists of about one foot of sandy soil on a clay base (excellent footing for riding) with more dense soil at the higher elevations providing stability. The terrain allows good drainage and the property is not in a flood or high fire risk zone and not on a major earthquake fault. Although the land has historically been used for a few family dwellings, its primary use for generations has been as pasture with sufficient water to support large herds of cattle. Since most of the property is in a valley, it is also protected from high winds, but its proximity to the ocean provides breezes in the afternoons which cool the high summer temperatures. Although the location is close to the Refuse Center, the Southeast direction of the wind blows potential odors away from the CEPEC site. In addition, the slope of the land containing the Refuse result in winter rains draining to the south - away from the CEPEC site. The location is also quiet with the majority of the property is beyond the outside limits of endangered reptile species. An aerial view of the site is shown below.



The next stage in the development of CEPEC will be to work with Open Space to secure the property.