

San Luis Obispo County Responds to Oak Woodlands Clear-cut with Urgency Measures

We've never seen anything of this scale and magnitude...I looked down and said, "Whoa, what is happening here?" It was startling.... I'm a property-rights person, but if you don't do something, there won't be any property to protect. Matt Trevisan of Linne Calodo Cellars, quoted in the [San Francisco Chronicle](#).



The image on the left is from Google Maps of the Justin Vineyards property in Paso Robles in 2015. At right is the same property photographed by Matt Trevisan. (These images originally appeared in the [Paso Robles Daily News](#).)

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors passed two urgency ordinances in response to the public outcry after the two photographs above—showing the devastation resulting from the clear-cuts of oak trees at Justin Vineyards—went viral. The ordinances took immediate effect when they were passed on July 15, and govern activities on unincorporated lands outside of the county's coastal zone. The ordinances, originally in place for 45-days, were extended at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors held on August 16. Janet Cobb, Executive Officer of California Wildlife Foundation/California Oaks, testified along with more than 20 local community leaders in favor of the tree ordinance. [Click Here](#) for more information on the hearing.

The tree ordinance limits the cutting and removal of various species of oak trees—Blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*), Coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), Interior live oak (*Quercus wislizeni*), Valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), and Black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*)—as well as other native trees. Trees that are diseased or that need to be removed for emergency purposes are exempted from the regulation. The [ordinance](#) allows removal of up to 5% of native tree canopy on lands used for agricultural operations. Canopy—both before and after oak removal operations—is measured by the county's aerial photography. Sites under conservation or under an open

space easement that “provides for the management of Native Trees or Oak Woodland pursuant to a management plan” are exempt from the ordinance. A minor use permit is required for the removal of up to 10% of the native tree canopy. A conditional use permit is required for removal of more than 10%, and an Environmental Impact Report is required for more than 25%. The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to extend the ordinance until April 2017. [Read more about the ordinance by clicking here.](#)

The second urgency ordinance strengthens the approval process for the construction of agricultural water storage ponds and reservoirs. It was enacted in response to concerns raised by Justin's neighboring well owners regarding potential impacts to their water supplies by the construction of the reservoir pictured above. The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to extend the ordinance until May 2017.