OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

TO: Legislation Committee
Supervisor Susan A. Bonilla, Chair
Supervisor Gayle B. Uilkema, Member

FROM: Lara DeLaney, Legislative Coordinator

DATE: January 25, 2010

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item #5: Opinion on Name Change for Mount Diablo to Mount Reagan**

RECOMMENDATION

1. REVIEW the proposal to change the name of Mount Diablo to Mount Reagan and make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on the proposal before March 31, 2010.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names is responsible by law for adjudicating decisions regarding geographic names for use by the departments and agencies of the Federal government. On June 18, 2009 and again on January 6, 2010, the County was contacted regarding the County's opinion on a proposed name change for Mount Diablo. The County is requested to respond to this matter before March 31, 2010. If no response is received, the Board on Geographic Names will consider the County's opinion to be neutral and will make a decision that might affect the name. (See *Attachment A*.)

EXCERPT FROM THE US BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES "QUARTERLY REVIEW LIST"

Case Summary: This proposal is to change officially the name of Mount Diablo, a 1,171 m (3,849 ft) summit in east-central Contra Costa County, to Mount Reagan.

The new name is intended to honor Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911-2004), the 33rd governor of California (1967-1975) and 40th president of the United States (1981-1989). According to the proponent, who provided a copy of the Wikipedia entry for President Reagan with his application, "The Commemorative Name (Mt. Reagan) speaks for itself."

The proponent, a resident of Oakley, believes the word “Diablo” is “derogatory and profane” and should be changed. This is his second attempt to seek a new name for the summit; in 2005 the BGN did not approve his proposal to change it to Mount Yahweh (two other proposals, for Mount Miwok and Mount Ohlone, were considered and rejected at the same meeting. An earlier proposal from the same proponent, for Mount Kawukum, was withdrawn in favor of Mount Yahweh). In voting not to support those proposals, the BGN cited the negative recommendations of the Contra Costa County Supervisors, the California Advisory Committee on Geographic Names, and numerous other local organizations, as well as a reluctance to change a longstanding name in widespread verbal and published usage. Many of the aforementioned organizations include “Mount Diablo” in their name.

In his initial application to the BGN, the proponent suggested that the summit should be renamed either “Kawukum” (later amended to Mount Yahweh), or named in honor of President Reagan. However, he was told that because of the Commemorative Naming Policy, the latter name could not be considered until 2009 and so the BGN would proceed with the former name. To this, the proponent responded that the Devil was “a living person”, so how could naming a feature “Diablo” be acceptable?

Citing research conducted for the previous proposals, including an article entitled How Did Mount Diablo Get Its Name? (Mount Diablo State Park website), there are several theories regarding the origin of the summit’s current name, including one that suggests it was applied in the early nineteenth century, when members of a Spanish military expedition were involved in a search for some runaway Chupcan Indians. The runaways escaped into the thick brush, which the Spanish soldiers referred to as Monte del Diablo (“thicket of the Devil”). The Indians had in fact escaped across a local stream, “an act only possible with the help of the Devil.” Over the years, the English-speaking settlers of the area mistakenly presumed the term “monte” referred to the summit, hence the name Mount Diablo for the feature. Another story, provided in *California’s Spanish Place-Names* (Marinacci, 1997), suggests, “It took its name supposedly from the time when Spanish soldiers were treated to a diabolical dance by their Indian foes’ medicine man.” Dr. William Bright, in his 1998 revision of Erwin Gudde’s *California Place Names*, reports that the earliest occurrence of the name Monte del Diablo was likely “on the Plano topográfico de la Misión de San José about 1824.” Several sources indicate that other indigenous and Spanish names have been applied to the summit over the years, such as Cerro Alto De Los Bolbones, Monte Del Diablo, Monte Diablo, Monte Diavolo, Mount Diabolo, ‘Oj-ompil-e, Sierra De Los Bolbones, Sukku Jaman, Supemenenu, and Tuyshtak.

The existing name has appeared on USGS topographic maps since 1896, and also is on the official Contra Costa County highway map and numerous other maps dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. A large number of local organizations dedicated to astronomy, aviation, surveying, and land preservation

have been named for the summit. The name Mount Diablo also applies to one of the three lines of meridian that pass through the State of California, and upon which the numbering of the township and range system is based. The peak of the summit serves as the initial point for the base and meridian lines.

The proponent of the name change reports that when Contra Costa County was established and was to be named, the name “Mount Diablo County” was rejected in favor of something “less profane.” Prior to submitting his original proposal to the BGN, he approached the management of the State Park with a request that the park be renamed, but the Department of Parks and Recreation denied that appeal, suggesting that the name was well established locally and regionally and that when the park was named in 1931, no objections to the name were received. They suggested that the proponent contact the BGN regarding the renaming of the summit.

According to GNIS, there are four administrative features in California, three buildings and a school, named in honor of Ronald Reagan.