

SoCAL Council Meeting
Saturday, May 3rd .
El Dorado Nature Center
7550 E Spring St
Long Beach, CA 90815

NOTES

Special Guest

Belinda Faustinos, Executive Director of Rivers & Mountains Conservancy <http://www.rmc.ca.gov/> and Audubon California Board member joined the Council meeting as a special guest to give us an update on two very important projects of interest to Southern California chapters: 1) the Discovery Center in Whittier Narrows; and 2) progress on conservation and restoration plans for Los Cerritos Wetlands in Long Beach, in part with our host El Dorado Audubon and Conservation Chair Mary Parsell, who is also President of the Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust.

Both Whittier Narrows and Los Cerritos wetlands are Audubon California Important Bird Areas.

Belinda described the role of her Conservancy since 2000 (Sen. Solis and Havis sponsored the legislation) to recognize and conserve watersheds and bring watersheds into conservation. The Conservancy has directed over 60 million dollars toward acquisition and restoration along the San Gabriel watershed. Grants are from bond funds (51 million in Prop 84 are earmarked to the Conservancy) are coming up so chapters should apply. They are site based so acquisition and restoration are priorities, but if there was a restoration and education combined project that could qualify for a grant. Conservancy has funded the City of Long Beach for restoration of El Dorado Nature Center. Board of Directors of the Conservancy includes six local elected officials so the integration with local politics is complete.

Belinda spoke about San Gabriel River Discovery Center (joint powers are upper San Gabriel Water District, Central Basin Water District, County of Los Angeles, Rivers & Mountains Conservancy). This will replace the Whittier Narrows Nature Center. The Center EIR will be released in late June and early July. The Discovery Center will be based in environmental education on the River. Over 300 species of birds at Whittier Narrows. Current structure is 3000 sq feet, proposed new footprint is 18,000 sq ft including a 150 car parking lot. There will be impacts, and RMC is looking at mitigation that is beyond what is required.

Donna Bray (ED) asked about the neglect by Los Angeles County and the neglected habitat. RMC and Army Corps Of Engineers is currently updating a Restoration Plan hopefully completed in the next year. Phase 2 after the Center will be restoration. Whittier Dam is an Audubon California Important Bird Area. Joint powers have 10 million of the 27 million needed. Construction is expected to start 2010 or 2011. Los Angeles County will maintain the Center. Right now \$250,000/yr for operational costs. Estimated \$750,000 will be needed, so an endowment will be needed to close that funding gap.

Donna Bray (ED) asked about Dominguez De Forest Park project. The entire freshwater marsh will be restored. RMC is encouraging the City of Long Beach to look closely at using another water source rather than just storm water.

Belinda talked about Los Cerritos wetlands. RMC created a joint powers authority with city of LB, Coastal Conservancy, City of Seal Beach for acquisition and restoration. Two years ago, 66 acres (Bryant phase 1 properties) were purchased, and they are in negotiation for 100 acres in Seal Beach, Bixby property is the high priority for wetlands recovery, Wildlife Conservation Board has taken an interest. Restoration planning is beginning. Mary Parsell explained that El Dorado Audubon has a long history since the 70s of leading tours in the pristine tidal area. One Saturday they had 400 people on a Saturday. El Dorado produced a video of Lost Jewel of the Coast. Kris Bender, environmental teacher and current Executive Director of Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust. They are currently building the bird

database. Los Cerritos wetlands is an Audubon California Important Bird Area. Mary asked about other adjoining properties at the wetlands.

Chris Redfern elected new Audubon California Board rep

San Diego Audubon has nominated Executive Director Chris Redfern to the Board of Audubon California as our Chapter Rep. All other chapters declined to nominate a Board rep, so unless there is an objection Chris Redfern has been elected to the Board unanimously. Please welcome Chris to his new role at the Council Meeting

Chapter reports

El Dorado is creating signage near Mt. Wilson with their Audubon California grant. The signage will be installed hopefully on May 16th.

Rich Sonnenberg and other chapters talked about declining results in traditional Bird-a-thons, and the group began thinking about new ways to do Birdathons.

- PV/SB took a team by bicycle as a "Green Team" with no emissions for their Bird-a-thon
- Los Angeles Audubon did a Big Year by one person with sponsors signing up during the year
- SFV allowed field trips to be Bird-a-thons and opened up the time frame on Bird-a-thons. They abandoned their appeal letter in favor of the new Bird-a-thons, which bring in about \$ 9,000-12,000/yr.

Most chapters are thinking of "giving up the glory for the gold" to raise money, but find that attendance may decline. Chris Redfern of SD found that the Bird-a-thon and Year End Appeal are different markets. S&S found a good response to an appeal for binoculars, and found some new donors that didn't necessarily support Bird-a-thon or Year End Appeal.

PV/SB celebrated 30 years at Earth Day celebration and passed out awards.

Pomona Valley Audubon had a bird-a-thon and also bought binoculars for kids, especially for Bluebird trail which has bluebird boxes on their trails.

S&S is expanding their facilities. There will be a second Duck Club, redoing the parking lot. S&S celebrated their 50th anniversary with David Sibley as speaker (261 attended) and Sibley gave a workshop. S&S has established an endowment and has established a Science Committee for high school and college students. Trying to get college credits for the kids that work in the field with Pete Bloom, Scott Thomas, Robb Hamilton. Donald Bren donated 38,000 acres in Orange County which will be managed by Irvine Land Conservancy and be part of the new US Natural Landmark system. S&S hopes to run education and conservation programs there. Donald Bren donated an additional 12,000 as California Natural Landmark in a state program designed by Audubon California. Glenn Olson emceed the dedication of the California Natural Landmark. S&S would like to make scholarships available for Orange County Park Rangers to go to National Audubon nature training in Hog Island, Maine. Supervisor of Park Service went to camp thanks to Sea & Sage years ago and he never forgot it.

Donna Bray reported that she was having trouble commenting on the IBA mapping because she couldn't print the maps very legibly. Drew SBV said that he felt that some of the boundaries were somewhat arbitrary and couldn't really be determined without a biological survey.

The chapters asked for a clearer date, extended deadline and some clearer maps for printing.

Peter Thomas (**SD**) reported that San Diego Audubon recently conducted an audit at a cost of around \$3,500, and the audit gave the org some great information and pointed out some deficiencies in internal controls and potential conflicts of interest. The Bird Festival had a great turnout and earned them around \$ 7,000 in profit.

Urban Conservation

SFV stopped development at Las Lomas development that wanted to chop off the top of a mountain. **SFV** is very involved in CALTRANS connector of 101-405 interchange which would threaten Sepulveda Wildlife Area (120 acres including wildlife lake and creek which flow into LA River). Two of the four proposals would take out approx. 20 acres of the wildlife area North of Burbank Blvd. One would not impact the wildlife area. The fourth proposal is no build. SFV supports the first proposal, and asked for public comment letters and to attend the public hearing on May 14th.

LA and SFV Audubon are working together on Hansen Dam, which is an Audubon California Important Bird Area. One of last vestiges of alluvial fan scrub. SFV and LA did a walk around on April 19th to assess a proposal to take 27 acres for an equestrian facility which would take out habitat of Cactus Wren. California Gnatcatcher has been discovered there first time in 30 years.

S&S reported on Wall of Death that Scott Thomas will give a report to the Coastal Commission in July. Scott Thomas sat down with Supervisor of County Parks and achieved contractual commitment that all tree trimming will be completed by February 15th or they won't be paid. Pete Bloom sent letters to everyone in Orange County to report sightings of White-tailed Kite in Orange County. Mary Parsell reported on Kites that they have seen in Orange County.

SBV won a couple of conservation awards. Environment Now in Santa Barbara gave an award to SBV for their lawsuit on SBV County not including the impacts of global warming in the County plan. SBV gave an award to Wildlands Conservancy for acquiring the most land for natural purposes to augment the Mojave preserve. WC just had their 50,000th child go through their education program.

Mojave Desert is gold rush of wind farms. There are 63 applications for wind farms at the BLM. There is one project for 28 turbines at Granite Mtn in Apple Valley. There is a lot of opposition from the local population. 480,000 acres has been set aside for potential wind farms by BLM. This does not include land that might be available by the County. Garry expressed concern for Golden Eagles in the Mojave as there are 100 eagle nests, and the young need approximately 2-5 miles buffer zones around turbines because they are poor flyers and rely on the winds.

County mowed down 5 miles on the San Jacinto River that included California Gnatcatcher and Willow Flycatcher habitat. There is also a project to channelize the same stretch of River. The new Manager of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area seems to be destroying habitat by building dams and berms including one berm that destroyed Burrowing Owl nests and fledglings. There was a Tricolored Blackbird survey over the weekend and most of the birds were found outside the Important Bird Area. Goat Hills is at the entrance to Canyon Lake. There is a homeowner planning to remove a hilltop that would require three years of dirt removal by three trucks eight hours a day through a wildlife reserve. Pellisier Ranch is 1400 acres of undeveloped land on banks of San Jacinto River with native habitat. The City of Colton has decided to zone it for 2400 houses. A piece of good news: The Torres-Martinez Indians have taken it upon themselves to create and restore wetlands at the North end of the Salton Sea. They have hired a full time ecological engineer. She is getting grant money and has restored 1,000-2,000 acres so far and her goal is 10,000 acres. San Bernardino Board member is a biologist who counts birds in the project.

GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR AN AUDUBON BOARD AWARD.

Garry reported that LA, PV/SB and SMBAY Audubons have signed on to a lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles for implementing a Trap-Neuter-Return policy without conducting an environmental review. Garry also reported that Los Angeles Audubon is receiving fines from killing of raptors by pigeon fanciers and distributing them to raptor rehab and research. LA AUDUBON is supporting an effort by Audubon Society of Portland and Congressman Peter DeFazio to strengthen the Migratory Bird Act by increasing killing of birds, especially raptors, from a misdemeanor to a felony, and increasing the fines to \$ 50,000. There is an article on this in May/June AUDUBON MAGAZINE, now online <http://audubonmagazine.org/incite/incite0805.html>

Toll Road comment period at Commerce Department may be over soon. S&S urged that chapters comment to the Commerce Department.

Legislative Actions and Updates

Garry reported on current Audubon California policy efforts:

- 98/99 (No on 98, Yes on 99)
- SB1165 (Kuehl) to strengthen CEQA by 1) requiring EIRs older than 5 years to be supplemented before project begins and 2) requiring transparency in communications and data between lead agency and environmental consultants. 1) was inspired by Debs Park Director Elva Yanez' Elephant Hills campaign on a 20 year old EIR in East LA; and 2) was inspired by the EIR on Newhall Ranch which LA, SFV, VENTURA Audubons were involved in.

Drew suggested that lead agency notification be expanded in SB1165. Garry will suggest to Dan and to Shiela Kuehl's office. Former librarian reported that public library notifications tend to sit in the basement until a day before the hearings or deadlines. Mary explained that EIR was available online but the biological resources were only available in the library

- Klamath Settlement: Garry asked all to ignore any emails asking Audubon chapters to take a position on this complicated issue until Audubon California has sorted it out.

Suggestions: ACCESS SACRAMENTO for April 2009. Drew will be on Committee. There was strong enthusiasm for this effort.

GOOD TOPIC FOR ASSEMBLY 2009.

NATIONAL DOES SAT-SUN workshops. Then MONDAY morning you visit legislators as a group in each office. Group recommended that Audubon California do the same.

Garry asked for each chapter to identify two advocates for communication on legislative matters at each chapter that will take the lead.

Toyota Together Green grant workshop

The group spent time talking about the three components of the \$ 20 million dollar partnership program between Toyota and Audubon:

-Fellows Any part of Audubon can nominate a conservation fellow to be trained in conservation planning W.Va, and return with \$10,000 for a conservation project. Across the border fellows nominations are encouraged.

-Innovation Grants Any part of Audubon can apply for this grant between \$ 5,000 - \$100,000. The grant criteria is to

- Conserve or restore habitat and protect species, improve water quality or quantity, and reduce the threat of global warming;
- Engage new and diverse audiences in conservation actions;
- Inspire and use innovative approaches and technologies to engage people and achieve conservation results; and
- Build the capacity of conservation professionals within the Audubon network and beyond.

Great ideas that came out of this portion of the discussion include:

- Partnering with LA or California Conservation Corps in a restoration project, possibly with matching funds from a conservancy;
- Reaching out to possible partnering orgs for ideas that might already be out there rather than trying to come up with one

- Considering working around IBAs to restore or intake data (Hansen Dam was an immediate possibility, as was Dominguez Park, others)
- Funds to pay for Project Manager, Volunteer Coordinator are definitely part of the capacity building intent of this grant, and a great way to add staff to a chapter whose volunteers and board are overworked.

-Volunteer Days Only chapters and centers can apply for this \$ 7,000 grant for Volunteer Coordination and Marketing for a local event on a National day like National Lands Day or Earth Day.

Update: Drew Feldman copied and put together all the information on the grants and his document is attached. Thank you Drew.

.pdf files for download have been added at our request at www.togethergreen.org/grants and www.togethergreen.org/fellows. Be sure and look at the Conservation Planning Guide under <http://www.togethergreen.org/grants/GrantsGuidelines.htm> . None of these links are accessible from the home page!

Future Meetings

The group agreed to meet quarterly on the 2nd Saturday and planned the following future dates and locations. PLEASE PUT THEM IN YOUR CALENDAR!

Sat, Aug 9	San Diego
Sat, Nov 8	Pasadena
Sat, Feb 14	Sea and Sage
Sun-Tues	
March 15-17	Audubon Assembly, Asilomar
Sat, May 9	El Dorado