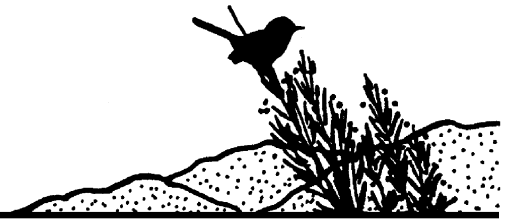


ENDANGERED HABITATS LEAGUE

Dedicated to Ecosystem Protection and Improved Land Use Planning

Dan Silver • Coordinator
8424-A Santa Monica Blvd., #592
Los Angeles, CA 90069-4267
TEL: 323•654•1456 FAX: 323•654•1931



NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2001

VOL. 11 • NO. 1

Reports from the Inland Empire

Often considered a lost cause, there is actually great conservation potential in the "Inland Empire" of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. From inland wetlands to granite mountains, there is beauty and great biodiversity. Here is a selection of reports on EHL's work in this part of the Southern California ecoregion.

Riverside County Multiple Species Plan Advances

A major milestone was reached in Riverside County as the most biologically comprehensive of three potential alternatives was chosen as a basis for more detailed planning. With large core areas and a comprehensive system of linkages, "Alternative 1" was the only option that took an ecosystem approach. After weeks of deliberation, the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Advisory Committee unanimously recommended this alternative to the Board of Supervisors, who then adopted it as the preferred option pending full evaluation in an environmental impact report. Very helpful in this decision were comments from the University of California at Riverside Scientific Review Panel, under contract to the MSHCP, and from the Conservation Biology Institute in San Diego. The conclusion was that only Alternative 1 was scientifically defensible.

EHL strongly argued for this selection, but will seek additional improvements, such as more grassland conservation for raptor species. If the Advisory Committee can overcome other, contentious disputes and agree on an implementation program, many fine areas will see preservation. For example, the Warm Springs Creek Core Area is a stronghold of the endangered quino checkerspot butterfly and the threatened California gnatcatcher. It is under assault from all directions by rampant sprawl in the Temecula and Menifee Valleys.

Unfortunately, sprawl development projects continue to be processed by the County, irrespective of its MSHCP effort. EHL has identified four proposed projects that would create fatal flaws in the preserve system. These projects destroy essential habitat for the gnatcatcher, quino checkerspot, arroyo toad, and many rare plants. We have filed extensive

comments, and are prepared for litigation if acquisition or major project redesign does not occur.

Besides the MSHCP, there are two other components of the Riverside County Integrated Plan — land use (a General Plan update) and transportation (new east-west and north-south multimodal corridors). These components will be reviewed in a later Newsletter.

City of Chino Planning on Track

The City of Chino is annexing 5,000 acres of the former San Bernardino County Agricultural Preserve. This vast plain lies south of Ontario and east of the I-15 freeway. As readers may recall, the City of Ontario has already annexed 8,000 acres of the former Preserve, and EHL and the Sierra Club have been in litigation with the City of Ontario for years over a lack of planned open space. The situation in Chino looks more promising.

Most of the annexation area, perhaps 3,000 acres, will be subject to flooding as Prado Dam, downstream on the Santa Ana River, is raised for flood control purposes. Water agencies will be purchasing flood easements in the "inundation area." These easements will prevent residential development, but would allow replacement of agricultural uses by golf courses, racetracks, off-road vehicle parks, parking lots, etc.

The City of Chino proposed a "new urbanist" development project north of the flood-prone area, with a town center, higher density housing, and transit access. However, until EHL commented during public workshops, a variety of active recreational uses would be allowed within portions of the "inundation area" rather than open space, passive recreation (e.g., trails), and agriculture. Although it is now extensively degraded by dairy operations, there is a huge

opportunity to restore large parts of the inundation area to wildlife habitat, such as wetlands, and to retain agricultural uses. EHL will continue to work with the City of Chino to make this vision for the southern Chino Basin a reality.

Little Progress on Other Habitat Protection in San Bernardino County

Despite extensive negotiations between various local jurisdictions and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a regional conservation plan for the Delhi Sand Dune ecosystem remains elusive. The endangered Delhi Sands flower-loving fly (DSF) is but one unique species dependent upon the dunes. The City of Fontana is particularly uncooperative. EHL continues to monitor development proposals, and has made sure that scientific comments on the needs of the DSF are submitted during CEQA review of project proposals.

Similarly, there has been no substantial progress on a multiple species plan for San Bernardino County. To the contrary, the County has proposed developments that pave over rare alluvial fan sage scrub. Along San Timoteo Creek, EHL has joined other groups in filing suit against the Army Corps of Engineers and the County of San Bernardino over channelization of this important waterway.

Final Decision in Lawsuit

After months of complex legal tangling and an appeal filed by the County of Riverside, EHL has prevailed in its action to require surveys for the endangered quino checkerspot butterfly. The County had tried to exempt applicants for building permits from assessing potential impacts. Without such surveys, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would have no way of knowing whether take of this endangered species would occur. EHL was represented by Johnson and Sedlack in this case.



Illustration by Rudolph Freund from *The Desert Year* by Joseph Wood Krutch (William Sloane Associates, 1951).

San Diego 2020 Update Revamped

The “2020 Update” of the San Diego County General Plan will determine the fate of beautiful vistas, picturesque hamlets, and prime wildlife habitat in San Diego’s East County. At a January 10, 2001 hearing, subdividers and speculators were out in force to derail the Update. EHL organized a presentation in order to defend the precious landscape, pointing out its role in maintaining San Diego’s quality of life.

Up until the hearing, the Update process had been driven by community groups, which had significantly reduced the capacity of the old General Plan and adopted good floodplain protection standards. However, the “ranchette” sprawl of estate lots remained unchecked in their draft proposal.

At the hearing, in response to unhappiness from many interests, the Supervisors restructured the process so that both builders and environmentalists would have greater voices. They also directed the Planning Department to come up with new land use alternatives, and to hold rural and village design workshops, as EHL had suggested.

The result of this “shake up” is greater uncertainty. However, there is also a greater opportunity to get the Update on the right track. EHL will advocate reductions in population levels commensurate with environmental and infrastructure constraints, and for towns and villages with distinct edges rather than rural sprawl.

We commend the Board for the progress made in the Update so far.

Visit EHL’s website at:
<http://exo.com/~dsilver/>

ENDANGERED HABITATS LEAGUE

The Endangered Habitats League is a non-profit organization.
All contributions are tax-deductible.

Dan Silver Coordinator and Newsletter Editor

Jack Bath Director-San Bernardino County/EHL Secretary

Michael Beck Director-San Diego County

Jane Block Director-Riverside County

Pete DeSimone Director-Orange County

Jess Morton Director-Los Angeles County/EHL Treasurer

Terra Peninsular: A Baja California Land Trust

Land trusts are organizations that “do land deals,” such as purchasing parcels or conservation easements. Often, they pass their holdings on to another entity such as a park system or the Federal Government. This movement has been very successful in the United States — the Land Trust Alliance lists 160 land trusts operating in California alone. The land trust movement is now developing in Latin America. It is exciting to see a new non-profit sector develop that can help overburdened and underfunded governments protect habitats.

A new land trust, Terra Peninsular, is now being formed in Baja California. Terra Peninsular will be a Mexican NGO (non-governmental organization) working with the residents of the peninsula of Baja California to conserve the landscapes of the peninsula. The cities at the north and south ends of the peninsula are growing rapidly, with populations more than doubling each decade. This continued growth and tour-

ist development are threatening unique biological communities. In other areas vast corporate farming has eliminated some species and converted large areas to unsustainable agricultural uses. But, as any visitor to Baja California knows, the peninsula still contains large unpopulated areas, desert landscapes without equal, pristine coastal areas that are globally important, and important coastal sage scrub habitats.

Terra Peninsular will work to conserve the natural landscapes of the peninsula, by taking ownership of land and conservation easements where feasible, and by working with landowners (private, communal, and governmental) to develop management regimes that allow biological diversity to flourish. The Endangered Habitats League is acting as a fiscal sponsor for Terra Peninsular while the organization is being formed, allowing U.S. citizens and foundations to contribute to this important conservation effort.

There are great conservation opportunities in Baja California, and the community working to protect the peninsula is getting stronger every day.

For more information about Terra Peninsular, visit their web site: www.terrapeninsular.org.

Palos Verdes Peninsula NCCP Finally Moves Forward

After months of paralysis, the Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) on the Palos Verdes Peninsula appears to be moving forward again. The City of Rancho Palos Verdes (RPV) has offered a new preserve design as its “preferred” alternative, which offers significant improvements over previous efforts. It includes areas that are left for future development but have conditions placed on them to assure habitat viability. Considering the unwillingness of the developers who own the majority of remaining open space to take a positive role in the NCCP, this use of conditions is probably the best that can be hoped for now.

Also, the RPV City Council has at long last taken its own first proactive step for open space preservation. The local land conservancy has convinced the City Council to pass a resolution in favor of acquiring all the land in an area critical to NCCP success, establishing a policy of great symbolic value. This resolution by the City Council follows on the heels of its complete outrage over the plowing under of stands of coastal sage scrub in the future preserve area by one of the developers. Although probably not illegal, the wanton destruction of habitat may have been the wake-up call the City has always seemed to need.



Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) are found in the desert mountains of Baja California. Illustration by Hans J. Peeters from *California Mammals* (UC Press, 1988).

Cabrillo Beach

wings flashing black, white
two willets take flight, wheeling
warning waves black, white

tall breakers, squall lashed
race up the ashen-faced beach
beating their bare breasts

and seacliffs crumbling
stand, backs stooped at ocean's edge
old men in frayed clothes

swirling at wave's rush
among boulders of sunlight
go eddies of birds

with rustles of silk
seafoam's sheer lace slips away
untouched sand laid bare

clamshell talisman
that knew the sallies of tides
in thin ear's deaf whorl

sun's glint at noontime
drifting in tidepool ripples
on oceans of stone

all sleep in hot sun
save kelp flies in the wave's wrack
black motes still dancing

murmuring wavelet
bends to a strand of beached kelp
fingering its beads

bubbles on wet sand
where the hungry godwits probe
a dark paradise

one pelican glides
wing tips touching the swell's skin
apt benediction

evening flicks her tongue
across this shore's-lip of sand
to caress my ear

now braided grunion
silver the spent sea's fingers
jewelry of moon

—Jess Morton

ENDANGERED HABITATS LEAGUE

Dan Silver • Coordinator
8424-A Santa Monica Blvd., #592
Los Angeles, CA 90069-4267
TEL: 323•654•1456 FAX: 323•654•1931

First Class