



Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation, Inc.

Post Office Box 353, Agoura Hills, California 91301

June, 2007, MEETING (www.lvhf.org)

Thursday, June 21st 2007, 7:30 P.M.

The Place – Diamond X – Take Las Virgenes to Mulholland; turn left on Mulholland. For the next 3/4 mile, the King Gillette Ranch will be on your right. After you've passed Stokes Canyon Road, in about 3/4 mile, you will see a sign on your right with "Diamond X" and the National Park Service logo on it. A short distance past the sign a narrow road goes south at a right angle. This is Wickland Road, and, at this point you are entering the recently acquired King Gillette Ranch (Soka) property. Follow Wickland about 300 yards until the road forks; take the left-hand fork; keep bearing left to lighted house. Park; get out of your car; go into the lighted part of the house.

Call to Order

Officers' Reports

Roll Call

Correspondence/Announcements

Agenda Changes/ Approval

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Old Business/ Reports

Delegates Reports

Standard Pacific Hearing Report

Proposed Stoplight at intersection of Old Topanga and Mulholland Highway Report

Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor Study Act Report

Modification of By-laws Action

New Business

RIM OF THE VALLEY ACT HEARING

After Federation delegates voted unanimously to support Congressman Adam Schiff's Rim of the Valley Corridor Study Act we received a request from his Chief of Staff, Timothy Bergreen, to come to Washington on the 14th of June, to testify before the House Resources Committee on behalf of the bill. He told us that Committee staff had asked their office to provide a private witness to provide testimony to balance the opposition's witness.

Over the weekend Don Wallace generously offered to make the trip and the Federation agreed to pay for his airfare. On Monday morning Don spoke with Mr. Bergreen and was told that Congressman Schiff was in the district over the weekend, met with Joe Edmiston and that Joe agreed to testify. He asked the Federation to write a letter of support for the bill that would counter the points raised in an "Urgent Action Alert" issued by the American Land Rights Association (ALRA) who oppose the legislation.

We prepared a 4-page letter in support of the act, responded to the contentions made by ALRA and delivered it to Congressman Schiff's office on Wednesday afternoon. By the way, this "Urgent Action Alert" made some pretty outrageous statements and here are two examples with our responses.

"The corridors will be like a series of giant nooses put around the necks of the many communities in the encircled areas. Economic and social activities will be greatly inhibited. Access people now take for granted will be lost forever. Frankly, the Park Service has a record of being a very bad neighbor. Go to www.landrights.org for several socio-cultural assessments and histories of Park Service abuses."

"The picture of nooses around communities is alarming for someone living in one of those communities. The irony is that when I look up at the parkland surrounding our community I see a shared resource, not a threat. None of this statement rings true. Economic activities are controlled by Los Angeles County planning and zoning regulations just like you find in the rest of the country and to suggest that our social activities are somehow inhibited by living in the NRA is ridiculous. And, we have found the National Park Service has been an excellent neighbor actively working with the community on issues related to the NRA. Together we have found ways to allow use of the public lands that finds a balance between recreation and preservation. What is more, we have worked together to acquire important lands for the NRA and will continue to do so in the future."

"They say they will put in hiking trails, but the area is so hot in the summer that very little hiking takes place. There is virtually no water. In the winter, it becomes floods and mud. At the existing Santa Monica Mountains NRA they have to actually bus people out of the center of the City of Los Angeles in order to increase visitorship. People who have a choice don't spend much time there."

"This sounds like a pretty awful place -- I wonder why people are spending millions to live in or near the NRA? Yes it can be hot in the summer but people around here hike in the mornings and in the evening or on shaded trails along streams when it's warm. It does rain at times and occasionally there is flooding

but, most of the time, winter is one of the best times to enjoy the trail system with abundant wildflowers much of the year. Is it a bad thing for people to be able to come from the City on buses? It sure beats clogging the 101 with cars. I have personally been involved in education programs that introduce inner city children to the parks of the Santa Monica Mountains and the look of amazement on the faces of fifth graders who have never seen the ocean or a deer in a mountain meadow is priceless and exactly what the parks are for.”

Clearly, those who prepared this “Urgent Action Alert” have not spent much time in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

So how did the hearing go? We heard that it went very well with largely supportive comments and questions from Committee members. Congressman Schiff noted our support and cited our letter in particular which was entered into the hearing record. Thanks to everyone who supported this effort, especially Don, who was willing to take the red-eye to testify, and we will let you know how the bill is doing as it wends its way through Congress.

THE STATE OF THE MOUNTAINS – 29 YEARS LATER

Next year we will be celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the creation of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. We can certainly celebrate the fact that we have a national park unit at all, but what we have ended up with is a long way from the “Great Park” we had high hopes for in 1978.

Recognizing how quickly potential parkland was being subdivided, developed, and mansionized, the talk in Congress and the Carter Administration in 1978 was of allocating all the money to buy the park by 1984. This didn’t happen. Instead, a change of Administration and organized developer opposition brought a halt to all land acquisitions in 1981, and two-thirds of the \$20 million already appropriated was reverted back to the Treasury.

In the ensuing years the 520-acre Currey-Riach property in the Las Virgenes Valley (now Malibu Meadows and Deer Springs) – which the National Park Service was negotiating for in 1981 – was developed into the housing tracts, office buildings, and condominiums we see today. Soon Cheeseboro Canyon, Jordan Ranch, Paramount Ranch, and Soka were all under threat of dense urban development, and the Federation had its hands full fighting a host of “dragons”.

Fortunately some money began to flow from Congress again for a time during the George H.W. Bush Administration in the late ‘80’s, and Cheeseboro Canyon, Jordan Ranch, and Paramount II were saved, but, since the mid-90’s, presidents have not asked for, and Congress has not allocated the kind of money needed to continue making progress toward purchasing the lands identified for acquisition in the Park Service’s adopted Land Protection Plan. In this decade federal appropriations for Santa Monica Mountains park acquisition have dropped down to zero.

In spite of improved County planning, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area more and more resembles a chunk of Swiss cheese with large blocks of wild land and scenic ridges being carved up into large housing pads covered with increasingly large mansions. Scenic viewsheds, critical watersheds, and essential habitat linkages are gradually being decimated, while Congress does nothing. The original commitment to a “Great Park in the Santa Monica Mountains seems to have been forgotten in Washington.

Right now a mansion is being constructed on Piuma Ridge on the very edge of Malibu Canyon above Monte Nido. A tract of homes is going in along Triunfo Creek just downstream from Peter

Strauss Ranch. Brian Sweeney is planning to sell off and develop land on Craggs Drive next to Malibou Lakeside and is threatening to develop the whole mountainside to the west that was supposed to have been part of the park unless some park agency pays him an outrageous sum of money. A bunch of landowners are talking about developing 200 mansions on the ridges east of Cold Creek and Calabasas Highlands – all of this development would be on lands designated for purchase and protection by the National Park Service – and could be prevented if Congress would start spending money to buy land in the Santa Monica Mountains again.

Fortunately, in the recent past, the state has “stepped up to the plate” and purchased such key properties as Ahmanson Ranch and Soka, but we can’t count on that continuing in the future. Congress needs to be asked to resume spending some of our Land And Water Conservation Fund monies – monies that come from revenue for mining, oil drilling, and grazing on federal lands – to complete the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area as promised in the Park Service’s adopted Land Protection Plan.

To that end Congressman Henry Waxman has asked the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee to appropriate funds to purchase three high priority Santa Monica Mountains acquisitions, one of which is the 209-acre Sweeney property on the mountainside above Malibou Lake.

As far as we can tell, no one has yet asked either of our Senators to support any funding for park purchases in the Santa Monica Mountains, even though Senator Dianne Feinstein chairs the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee.

If you’d like to see our elected representatives get us some federal money to preserve threatened Santa Monica Mountains properties before it’s too late, here’s who to write to,

Senator Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
attn: Ryan Hunt

And

Senator Barbara Boxer
112 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
attn: Brian McKeon

If you want to write Congressman Henry Waxman to thank him for his efforts, his address is,

Congressman Henry Waxman
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Attn: Becky Cluster

KING GILLETTE RANCH TO OPEN TO THE PUBLIC JUNE 30th

One of our greatest battles – one we were once told we couldn’t win – is coming to a close.

Soka University, which, at one time proposed the development of a 5,000-student university with almost 2,000,000 sq ft of buildings in the meadows and woodlands at the southeast corner of Las Virgenes and Mulholland, is vacating its remaining lease on the campus six months early, and will be turning over the keys to the property to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy’s management agency, the MRCA, on June 29th.

The next day the King Gillette Ranch will open to the public. The plan at this point is to charge a day use fee similar to what is charged at Malibu Creek State Park, with the first 30 minutes free, and the fee charged after that.

No “grand opening” ceremony is planned, but the Conservancy plans a number of public programs – bird walks, guided history walks, “campfire” programs, etc. with a “multi-agency event” sometime around Labor Day.

The Conservancy is tentatively planning to hold its JULY 9th meeting at King Gillette Ranch, with a tour of the property before the meeting. Both the meeting and the tour - and the pre-meeting supper - would be open to the public.

Since plans for July 9th are still tentative, if you’re interested in the tour, which usually starts at 4:00, and the meeting, which will start at 7:30, log on to <http://www.smmc.ca.gov> or call (310) 589-3200 x118 for updated information on the tour and the meeting.

King Gillette Ranch will be owned and jointly administered by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the National Park Service, and California State Parks. It will almost certainly become the “one stop” visitor center and visitor contact facility for all the Santa Monica Mountains parks.

The public planning process for the future use of the property is expected to begin in the coming months, and will have an impact on the Las Virgenes area. For information on that planning process, log on to <http://smmc.ca.gov/KGRP/planning.html>.

LEGAL CHALLENGE TO STOPLIGHT FILED

A suit has been filed with the City of Calabasas challenging its categorical CEQA exemption from an environmental review for a proposed traffic signal at the intersection of Old Topanga Canyon Road and Mulholland Highway. Nearly 100 local citizens have added their names to a petition opposing the traffic signal on the grounds that it is inconsistent with the General Plan and would alter the character of two Scenic Corridors (Old Topanga and Mulholland). Also a nearby homeowners association has written to the City opposing the signal on similar grounds.

The suit contends that the project would have an adverse impact on the two designated Scenic Corridors; the rural, scenic and environmental character of the Headwaters Corner area and the Hillside Mountainous zoned land on the east side of the intersection and because of these factors, CEQA guidelines require an Initial Study and consider a negative declaration, a mitigated negative declaration or an EIR. In addition, the suit contends that opposition to the project in the form of a petition, action from the nearby homeowners association and letters published in the local newspaper should trigger an EIR based on the City of Calabasas CEQA Guidelines.

It goes on to point out that The City’s categorical exemption for this project violates CEQA on the basis that an agency is prohibited from exempting a project where evidence in the record supports a fair argument the project may have a significant impact on the environment. Evidence provided by the public both written and orally supports the conclusion the project may have a significant impact and that a fair argument supports the need for environmental review.

It also notes that the project is inconsistent with the general plan that expressly subordinates movement of traffic to the more important objective of preserving the essential character and natural environment of the area. Are there feasible alternatives that would avoid development of the traffic signal and still meet the goals of the project? For example, two white-gloved officers to coordinate traffic flow during peak traffic periods (there are officers at nearby Viewpoint School during these times). Also, a Memorandum of Understanding for traffic

management, between the City and Viewpoint, has not been fully implemented and may help to ease the situation.

Finally, the suit questions if all of the criteria for approval were met under the Calabasas Municipal Code requiring that the decision to approve a project such as this must be based on traffic and engineering principles, be in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, which requires consideration of environmental impact; be consistent with the Calabasas General Plan; and be consistent with the engineering and safety standards set by the state of California. It points out that evidence in the record does not support a finding that all of the Warrant on Crash Experience required by California safety standards criteria to justify the signal have been met.

LIBERTY CANYON RANCH UPDATE

You may remember that Samson Investment Company's presentation of the proposed Liberty Canyon Ranch at our April meeting. Federation delegates raised a number of questions for Mike Minder and his colleagues after they went through the history of their project and the three alternates now in the County planning process. Recently Mike contacted us to indicate that they have made some changes to the project based upon our meeting. He asked to return to the Federation to present those changes and field further questions and we invited him to the July meeting to give us an update. We urge anyone with an interest in this project to mark their calendars and participate in this important dialogue.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OFFICE MOVING TO PETER STRAUSS RANCH

The Resource Conservation District Of The Santa Monica Mountains, which has been operating out of Topanga since its creation, has moved its headquarters to the Park Service's Peter Strauss Ranch on Mulholland just west of Malibou Lake.

The District, originally known as the "Topanga-Las Virgenes Soil Conservation District", was formed under 1930's legislation designed to assist farmers and other landowners with soil conservation and erosion control problems.

In recent years the District, governed by a locally elected Board, has renamed itself a "resource conservation district" and branched out into a wide range of local resource conservation concerns including outdoor education programming while continuing to assist local landowners with soil conservation problems.

This coming Thursday, June 21st, the RCD Of The Santa Monica Mountains will hold a "Celebration Of Conservation" at Peter Strauss Ranch to commemorate the opening of its new office and inform local residents of the services offered by the District.

The program will begin with hors d'oeuvres at 5:30, a program at 6:30, and "music and mingling" from 7:30 to 9:00. All citizens are invited to attend. To RSVP call in by June 18th to (818) 597-8627 x102.

Directions: Take Kanan to Troutdale, turn left and then left on Mulholland and immediately right into the parking lot. Coming west on Mulholland, turn left into the parking lot immediately after crossing the bridge over Triunfo Creek.

WHAT RAINY SEASON?, CONT.

According to the latest Cold Creek Community Council Newsletter, Cold Creek at Mulholland and Stunt measured 5.11" of rain in the past year, while a resident near the top of Stunt on SADDLE PEAK measured 7.5". This compares to normal average annual rainfall in Monte Nido of 22" and 17" in Old Town Calabasas, and something in between for the rest of us. Most of us probably got between 4" and 5" over the past year, almost certainly the driest on record. (for the record, Monte Nido has received 6.03" of precipitation since July 1, 2006.)

Us old timers don't always realize this, but there's a lot of turnover in many of our neighborhoods, with new neighbors moving in from more humid climates, and from parts of southern California where homes are not as woven into the natural environment around them. Such folks often spend most of their time in the pool or on the patio, and don't always pay a lot of attention to all those funny looking weeds and bushes just outside the wall from their yard. The message over the years is that you can't wall yourself off from nature here. Flames 20-30' high, driven by hot, dry Santa Ana winds, race up hillsides and leap over the roofs of two-story houses, while all sorts of wild critters inevitably find their way into our yards and shrubbery, especially in dry years.

New residents of our communities need to be reminded of the need to do early and thorough weed clearance in this super-dry year and to be sure that planted shrubs and trees on the fringes of their yards get enough deep watering this year that they don't dry out and become fire hazards themselves during the heat of summer and the Santa Ana winds of fall.

Since the drought is limiting plant foods and prey populations out in the hills, we may see more wild animals foraging for food in built-up neighborhoods (like the large, cat-like animal that was thrashing around in my shrubbery when I went out to turn off the sprinkler one night last week.)

Last week's *Acorn* had an article on one of those wild critters that occasionally shows up in our yards – the Southern Pacific Rattlesnake. New residents also need to be warned about these serpents in their new Eden, and that they are not just confined to the desert or remote hills.

The article also tells of local dogs that have been bitten, and forced to undergo expensive antivenin treatments at considerable cost to their owners. This year, of all years, pet owners should consider enrolling their dogs in a rattlesnake avoidance program, as the likelihood of dog-snake encounters will probably be much higher as the snakes leave their natural homes to look for rodents around our homes. For more information on snake avoidance training, call the Mountains Restoration Trust at 591-1701 or Bo Slyapich at 880-4269.

Native trees and shrubs look like they're holding up pretty well, but, as summer heat sets in, normally drought tolerant native trees and shrubs are going to lose moisture rapidly and become very combustible.

SHORT ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NOTES

Ben Saltsman called recently to let us know that the Board of Supervisors' hearing on the Santa Monica Mountains LCP has been scheduled for late October.

Also from Supervisor Yaroslavsky's office:

At the request of the Board of Supervisors, the continued public hearing on Triangle Ranch will be rescheduled from the originally set date of June 26, 2007 until July 24 2007.

CHP Officer Leland Tang has sent the following message about our new West Valley Area Commander.

I wanted to keep you in the loop. As Capt Badilla mention last month, he is transferring to the CHP Merced office. So, on Friday June 1st, Captain Stephen Webb assumed the command. I know the Federation will be very pleased with this new Captain. He was a former Sgt. Here at the West Valley office and a former resident of Malibu. He is very committed to the Santa Monica Mountains and Operation Safe Canyons. I will try (schedule permitting) to bring him to a Federation meeting so that the board members can meet him.

Also, Leland has sent the following announcement for an upcoming Operation Safe Canyons press event. Please feel free to attend if your schedule permits.



Captain Stephen Webb
West Valley Area Commander

Officer Leland Tang
Public Affairs & Information Officer
West Valley Area

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
06/24/2007

****MEDIA ADVISORY****

CHP CRACKS DOWN ON UNSAFE CANYON DRIVING.

MALIBU, CA - On June 25, 2007, at 11:00 am the CHP West Valley Area, in conjunction with Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Lost Hills Station, will be holding a press conference to introduce a comprehensive traffic safety program in the Santa Monica Mountains region. Operation Safe Canyons will focus on increasing traffic safety by utilizing Designated Enforcement Teams in order to confront the growing problem of illegal racing and other unsafe driving practices on the various canyon roads traversing the Santa Monica Mountains. In addition, members of the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, Lost Hills Station, will be jointly participating in the program and providing focused enforcement in the various incorporated gateway cities bordering the region.

WHEN: June 25, 2007 – 11:00 a.m.

WHERE: View Site on Mulholland Highway east of Kanan Dume Rd.

The location is easy to reach and provides a great photo op of the region and the some of the areas where the problems are most prevalent.

Please join us and our dedicated public safety partners including representatives from Assembly Member Julia Brownley's Office, Lost Hills Sheriff's Station, Los Angeles County D.A.'s Office and Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. Community members will also be present to provide their unique perspective. For further information, please contact Public Information Officer Leland Tang.