

**SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY**

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May 11, 2009

City Council  
City of Los Angeles  
200 N. Spring Street  
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**Inadequate Wildlife Corridor Analysis  
for Vesting Tentative Tract Map 62900-SL-2A  
CF 09-0082 Semi-Tropical Spiritualists Property  
ENV-2005-9337-MND-REC**

Hon. President Garcetti and Councilmembers:

The subject Semi-Tropical Spiritualists property is undisputably an extension of the Elysian Park core habitat area and a fundamental piece of the only habitat linkage that will keep this core habitat area connected to any other natural area (Griffith Park). Collectively the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) to date fails to address both of these facts adequately.

The two attached aerial photographs show this habitat linkage from the subject property across Allesandro Avenue under the Glendale Freeway to the former rights-of-ways for the Red Car line. The habitat linkage then follows the Red Car rights-of-ways northward across other streets to connect Griffith Park by the intersection of Los Feliz Boulevard and Riverside Drive. Approval of the subject project may permanently and significantly reduce the biological connectivity of Elysian Park to Griffith Park and the remainder of the Santa Monica Mountains. The presence of this wildlife corridor has been brought up repeatedly in at least two public hearings prior to the reconsideration of the MND.

The primary focus of this habitat connection is to allow for intermittent grey fox and coyote movement. Conditions that permit these two species to move also create the umbrella of favorable conditions for smaller native mammals—such as raccoons and skunks. In 2008, a grey fox was photographed in Red Car right-of-way just north of the subject Semi-Tropical Spiritualists Tract property. Those photographs were submitted into the Council File in April 2009 by one of the appellants. A population of grey fox lives in Elysian Park too. That same submittal to the file showed a coyote waiting to cross Allesandro Avenue directly across from the subject property. Both urban and suburban wildlife corridors involve the crossing of streets in the early morning hours when traffic is particularly light.

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Top predators--such as coyotes and grey foxes--are a critical part of the ecological balance. Groundbreaking studies (Soule, Conservation Biology, Volume 2, No. 1 March 1988) demonstrated that the absence of these predators in urban habitat islands directly leads to very high rates of extinction of chaparral-requiring bird species. The reason is that the predators are necessary to control "mesopredator" populations (skunks, racoons, domestic cats) that eat the birds, their young, and their eggs.

The MND concludes that the subject project site is not part of a wildlife corridor as follows:

Although Elysian Park (a 600-acre city park) exists to the east of the site, it is located on the other side of the ridgeline in a separate watershed, making the site unlikely to be used as a corridor given wildlife's affinity to utilize topographic features such as ridgelines or drainages. In addition, the areas to the east of the site are dominated by residential development, also making the site unlikely to serve as a corridor as it would not act to connect any western undeveloped areas to other habitats east of the site. The lack of evidence of mobile wildlife (such as mule deer) utilizing the project site, which is surrounded by residential development, indicates that such wildlife is unable/unwilling to travel through the project vicinity currently.

The disparity between the points of view of experts here is broad and glaring. One could argue that the paper portion Modjeska Street on the eastern boundary of the proposed tract would allow for adequate post-project wildlife movement. The Conservancy counter argues that the steepness of that paper street area coupled with it being tightly appressed next to a new 15-unit tract with no relevant enforceable lighting restrictions would significantly degrade the existing habitat capability. In contrast under current conditions, a broad band of gently sloped habitat friendly to wildlife appresses directly up to Allesandro Avenue opposite the Rosebud under-crossing.

The MND shall remain deficient until it analyzes how the proposed project could have an adverse impact on wildlife moving between the subject property and the Rosebud undercrossing beneath the Glendale Freeway. Currently the MND contains no mitigation measures except permanent protection of Modjeska Street from construction. That protection is poorly defined in the MND. The project should be reduced on its eastern end to accommodate an adequate wildlife corridor.

Once a link in a wildlife corridor chain is broken by a development approval, it is broken forever. The public deserves adequate consideration of these potential impacts and they are required by the California Environmental Quality Act. The value of long-term wildlife diversity in Elysian Park is of great local importance.

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**Unenforceable and Deficient Mitigation Measures for Public Trail and Publically-Accessible Open Space Lot**

The Conservancy's letter to the City Council dated February 24, 2009 clearly demonstrates that the current conditions of approval and mitigation measure will not guarantee an open space lot open to the public nor a public trail connecting El Moran to the proposed open space lot. That letter also specifically addresses how the condition and mitigation wording must be changed to achieve these public benefits that are commensurate with the up-zoning and level of environmental impact. That letter is incorporated by reference. In contrast the applicant's use of a public street for private driveway purposes in lieu of a promised public trail is deceptive and may be gift of public funds.

**No Grading Map in California Environmental Quality Act Record is Deficient**

To this date, our staff has not seen a single document in any version of the MND that shows the limits of proposed grading on the open space lot on the south end of the project. How can an MND be continually revised without such information when its absence has been repeatedly noted in the public hearing process? How can decision makers ascertain the impacts of the project without that information? Our fear is that the unstable terrain and uncompacted fill warrant near complete grading of the site. If that is the case, the public has been deceived. In all cases without the limits of grading circulated for public review the MND shall remain deficient.

**Conclusion to Grant Appeals in Full**

We urge that the City Council grant the appeals in full unless the applicant voluntarily and conclusively requests at the public hearings on May 12<sup>th</sup> and May 13<sup>th</sup> that the matter be continued to create both a project and a newly circulated environmental document that address the deficiencies brought to the City's attention by the Conservancy and other parties. Please address any questions to my attention at the above address and by phone at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128.

Sincerely,



PAUL EDELMAN

Deputy Director

Natural Resources and Planning





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