

Comments and Supporting Information

Ad Hoc River Committee – January 28, 2013 *A/S-2024*

Kris Ohlenkamp (747) 444-9683 kris.ohlenkamp@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society

sfvaudubon.org

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We want to thank Jan Perry for asking questions and bringing this before the Committee, the City Council and the District Attorneys office. I look forward to working with you, and the Corps, to right the wrongs that were done, and to see that nothing like this ever happens again.

When I walked from the North Wildlife Reserve through the Wildlife Corridor into what was the South Wildlife Reserve I was shocked by what I saw. Now I am shocked by what I hear. They still will not admit that there is anything wrong with their Plan, and they would like to proceed with it.

What we would like is:

Restoration:	of the 48 acres of habitat for LBVi, YeWa, BlGr
Mitigation:	on a 3 to 1 basis - as they required in 1991
Compensation:	for city/county funds – improvements 1998
Communication:	community & regulatory agencies
Education:	employees – appreciate value of their properties and the meaning of environmental stewardship
Correction:	of the mistakes/omissions in the 2011 Master Plan

The Vegetative Management Plan for this project was carelessly written - and is seriously flawed.

Even worse, its implementation, was maliciously undertaken – and done with criminal negligence - or intent.

Examples: Wildlife pond obliterated
More than 100 native trees - including oaks removed
Bell's vireo habitat eliminated
Riparian vegetation destroyed
Soil plowed up and deeply disturbed

None of which was mentioned in the plan documents, and all done without the required notifications, consultations and approvals of other regulatory agencies.

SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS ABOUT THE PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- 1. The proposal is not in conformance with the Master Plan (MP).**
See MP section 4.2 – Vegetative Management Lands description and, 6.7 – Recommendations for that description and, 6.2.3 – “Environmentally Sensitive” classification also applies to this area.
- 2. There are substantial contradictions throughout the Project description.**
One example: On page 3 it says herbicides will be used “in the second year”, on page 5 it says “two year period of spraying the area with a herbicide”, on pages 18+19 it says “the spraying of an approved herbicide would occur for several years”.
- 3. There are numerous significant omissions and errors that are critical to the meaning of the document .**
One example: section 2.2.2 first paragraph: “In the first year...vegetation from the dam westward to the point where Burbank Blvd. crosses the Los Angeles River, native trees would remain”. What text is missing after the word River? Is it “and”, or is it “would be removed”.
- 4. There are numerous unsupported allegations with absolutely no supporting data provided.**
Some examples: no crime statistics presented, how many fires resulted from homeless encampments, what percent of vegetation cover was non-native.
- 5. Although salt grass is native to California, it is not native to the area, nor is it associated with oak woodlands, as is purported to be the case. Also, it would most likely not survive a normal summer here without irrigation.**
- 6. Section 1.5.2 states that there are “no formal recreation trails in the area” and yet the Corps and City/County funds paid more than \$60,000 for the construction of same in 1999 - which were destroyed by this project.**
- 7. Section 3.6.1, where discussing the endangered Bell’s Vireo, says “None have been observed in the proposed action area”. When, in fact, a Corps Ecologist (along with several others) have observed Bell’s Vireos within 5 feet of Haskell Creek – where all vegetation has now been removed.**
- 8. Section 3.6.2 states “A significant impact would occur if the proposed alternatives: created substantial loss of species diversity in natural vegetation and wildlife habitat.” How did this not trigger an EIS?**
- 9. Why is it necessary to remove vegetation, further than 50 feet from the toe of the embankment, “for visual inspection of the Dam features for flood risk management for safety downstream of the Dam”, as stated in the FONSI?**

SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS WITH THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

1. Native plants were not slated for removal and yet they were.

If the reasoning is that they were too intertwined with non-natives to effectively be removed, that should have been noted as part of the planning process (faulty assessment of existing conditions). If not, such a significant change in the protocol should have triggered a halt to the project until it could be reassessed. Who made the decision to change the protocol and proceed? Who was responsible for assessing the conditions prior to writing up the plan in the first place?

2. The District Senior Ecologist did not identify and flag any native trees (as required in the FONSI). Dozens of native trees were in fact removed, some dug up by the roots, and several Oak trees were rammed by tractors, cut with chain saws, and had their limbs hacked off.

This was observed and acknowledged by Alex Deraney (USACE), Louise Sahagun (LA Times), and others on December 28, 2012.

3. Section 2.2.2 says “all trucks would stay on existing maintenance roads”, which is obviously not the case (photo documentation) – in fact they created several new roads and obliterated the recreational trail and associated monuments.

4. There was no mention of the Wildlife Pond anywhere in the document. The filling in and complete obliteration of the Pond and associated habitat, where invasive non-native weeds were practically non-existent, was completely unwarranted and not within the scope of the FONSI.

5. Actual Least Bell’s Vireo habitat was eliminated when all of the riparian vegetation was removed from Haskell Creek between the footbridge and the Los Angeles River.

Observed by Kris Ohlenkamp and Carvell Bass (Corps Ecologist) on April 15, 2008, and several times independently thereafter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a plan to restore the project area to a sustainable diverse natural habitat in cooperation with the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee, the California Native Plant Society, and the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society.
2. Provide mitigation (on a 3 to 1 basis as was required by the Corps when other agencies disturbed habitat in the same area circa 1991) for the approximate 43 acres of habitat that was destroyed.
3. Make improvements in USACE public outreach and communication functions within the USACE to assure timely and effective notifications before any work is done on USACE property that may impact the quality of the environment.
4. Pay compensation for City/County/State funded improvement projects (circa 1998) that were destroyed by this VMP. Funds should go to the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering (SBWASC) for maintenance and improvement of wildlife habitat throughout the Sepulveda Basin.
5. Ensure a continuing permanent, dedicated enforcement presence in all Corps owned and managed property in the San Fernando Valley.
6. Improve and implement personnel policies and practices designed to ensure that all employees are aware of, understand, and follow USACE mandates in regards to environmental stewardship.
7. Provide a supplement to the Master Plan that corrects the errors, omissions, and ambiguities that exist, while taking into account the comments provided during that public input process.

SEPULVEDA BASIN TREES REMOVED DECEMBER 2012

Pre-project conditions: In the area east of Haskell Creek (about half of the total area impacted), a conservative count of trees and tree clumps (multiple trunks) from an enlarged Google Earth image circa 2002 is approximately 275. Oak trees (30) could be counted separately due to their darker green foliage and knowing where to look (familiarity with the area before and after). Only large trees greater than an estimated 8 feet in diameter canopy were counted. Due to the age of this photo there may have been even more large trees in the area by December 2013. Due to the complete canopy in some areas the exact number of trees could not be determined and were estimated based upon relative size of other trees in the area.

Current conditions: An individual count of trees by species was performed on site by Kris Ohlenkamp on 1/9/2013. Multiple trunks growing within the same 5 foot diameter circle were counted as one tree. There were no trees smaller than 10 feet high anywhere in the area.

Eucalyptus	12
Non-native Ash	5
*Native Ash + Cottonwood	110
Oaks (all species)	25
Sycamores	15
Willows (all species)	5

Total trees present: 175 (17 non-native)

Results: Approximately 100 large trees were removed in the area east of Haskell Creek (including 5 Oak trees). About 17 non-native trees remain. The slightly smaller area west of Haskell Creek was not surveyed.

*Cottonwood and deciduous ash trees were grouped together because of the difficulty of telling them apart from a distance when bare of leaves and of different ages.



The Sepulveda Basin Disaster

robert munsey <k6piu@instanet.com>

Mon, Jan 28, 2013 at 8:57 AM

To: Eric.Villanueva@lacity.org

Cc: Glenn Bailey <glennbaileysfv@yahoo.com>, kris ohlenkamp <kris.ohlenkamp@sbcglobal.net>

Reference Council File Number 13-0024:

By reviewing the most recent activity plans of the Army Corps of Engineering there seems to be a common path. For each there has been an environmental report (the word study does not fit) which states that there would be No Environmental Impact. The proposed activity seemed to be relatively small and of limited intent. In comparing intended activity and the results perhaps the Plan was correct.

However, the Finding of No Significant Impact and the results of Using the "Sledgehammer on a Fly" method for the Sepulveda Wildlife Reserve, South, have shown to be a fiasco. To "Manage Vegetation" but using large earthmoving equipment and chainsaws without prior on-site evaluation by knowledgeable persons who were not only available but had volunteered to evaluate the growth of as much as 30 years, resulted in the removal of not only exotic vegetation but extremely valuable native plants. Many of the now-lost plantings were provided by several government and civic organization and were critical to the affected wildlife.

Many of the plants that might have been not-removed were within the native biota which had become a treasured wildlife habitat. It seems to have been said that they were providing risk at times of flooding. However, the plants had been there for extended time and during that time there had been several floodings of the basin without causing any apparent risk to areas protected by the Sepulveda Flood Control Dam. The resultant destruction has caused a very expensive restoration to be facing the Sepulveda Basin.

Respectfully,

Robert Munsey,

Member the Sepulveda Wildlife Basin

Advisory Committee

Representing the Los Angeles Audubon Chapter