

Wetland Preservation Vital to Conejo's Plants and Animals

by Supervisor Linda Parks, August 2007

I was surprised to see a beautiful white heron checking out the landscaping along the 101 freeway off ramp. I wasn't expecting to look out my car window and see the statuesque bird, and I was awed when it took off in flight with its huge wingspan.

Sometimes we can take for granted the natural features that have managed to remain within our urban areas. When nature and city collide, it is rare that natural areas survive, but when they do, they are all the more appreciated.

Wildlife experts prioritize the preservation of linkages that allow for wildlife to pass unhindered from one large area of natural habitat to another. These linkages are essential as wildlife habitat shrinks and animals become isolated, leading to inbreeding and loss of species.

Of equal importance, I believe, is the preservation of wetland areas, particularly when they are rare in a region. In the Conejo Valley, the number of wetland areas can be counted on one hand. What makes wetlands so special is that they are the only places for many species of plants and animals, like the white heron, to live.

One such wetland has long been treasured by neighbors along the south side of the 101 freeway between Borchard and Wendy roads. Many a child has wandered the land over the years, finding pollywogs and other amphibians, reptiles, a tremendous variety of birds and mammals. The land is a thriving ecosystem and is all the more vital for its rarity.

It isn't for lack of trying that this Borchard wetland area has remained unbuilt. The land, owned by Nasser Moradian, was envisioned by the owner for a housing tract of approximately 100 houses. Like the steep hills of the Conejo Valley, this wetland area has not been built on to date because of the difficulty the land poses for development.

The Moradian wetland area is constrained by rainwater, which for decades has flowed from the Newbury Park area to this low-lying land, which has a flood-control easement over most of the acreage. Mr. Moradian has entered into litigation against the city of Thousand Oaks related to his desire to build and the flow of water onto his property.

Certainly, the developer owns the land and has his property rights, but instead of suing, I would hope a settlement can be reached. The community could gain much more than another batch of tract housing if there is a will by government agencies and the landowner to have the land purchased for an ecological, preserve and park.

The area could serve as an outdoor classroom to learn about ecology; wildlife could continue to thrive; and wetland plants, which have now become rare to our area, could continue to have a place in the Conejo Valley.

As we've seen the tireless efforts of people like Mary Wiesbrock, who led the 17-year fight for Ahmanson Ranch, and Clint Matkovich, who has been pleading with city officials and Mr. Moradian to open their eyes to the intrinsic value of the 39-acre wetland as it is, we know that where there is a will, there is a way.

We are fortunate that voters have approved Proposition 84 funds for parkland and wetland acquisition and that we have strong conservation agencies, such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservation Agency and the Coastal Conservancy, that have funds available to purchase lands in our area so we all can enjoy nature's bounty right in the middle of our city. Now is the time.