

Open Spaces

Fourth Quarter 1997

A newsletter published by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

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Shoreline Park Preservation Moves Ahead

With active support of Supervisor Don Knabe, The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted in September to transfer ownership of the 53-acre parcel known as Shoreline Park to the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. This action substantially increases the likelihood that the property will be preserved as natural open space.

The Shoreline Park property was acquired by LA County as a park site. The county drafted a proposal in the 60s which would have installed a parking area, a small shelter, and picnic tables on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific, but the plan was opposed by the local community and never implemented.

In the late 1980s the County announced that the land, which is on the western edge of the ancient South Shores landslide, would be sold, and concepts developed by owners of the adjacent shoreline property included the land as part of a proposed golf course and Ritz Carlton hotel development.

Sale of the property was canceled when the State Coastal Conservancy announced its interest in the preservation of the site, which contains California Gnatcatcher and Cactus Wren. When the County raised the sale possibility more recently, both the State and the City of Rancho Palos Verdes expressed interest in its acquisition.

The future of the site was strongly affected by a requirement from the State Coastal Commission that the developer of the adjacent property acquire a conservation easement over 20 acres of the Shoreline property as partial mitigation for the development. The Commission also required that the developer take actions to restore habitat in the 20-acre parcel.

The Conservancy has strongly supported the preservation of the property as natural open space since our founding in 1988, and has volunteered to maintain and restore the property at no cost to taxpayers if its future as natural open space is guaranteed (see letter below). We are most pleased with the County's actions in this matter and look forward to working with the City on the management of this beautiful area.

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Conservancy Offers Management of Shoreline

November 9, 1997

Dear Mayor McTaggart:

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I want to congratulate the City of Rancho Palos Verdes for the recent acquisition of the Shoreline Park property. As you know, the Conservancy has had a long interest in the preservation of this open space area, and we are most pleased to see that the property is now owned locally.

Since the Conservancy's founding in 1988, we have had a goal of managing the Shoreline property, which we call the South Shores Nature Preserve, as a nature preserve. We pledged to the County that we would manage the property at no cost to the County if we were granted a conservation easement over the entire site. We have developed a plan to revegetate the site with native plants and have had numerous offers of volunteer support for this task from local organizations.

I would like to extend the same offer to the City of Rancho Palos Verdes: We will manage the South Shores Nature Preserve property as a nature preserve at no cost to the City of Rancho Palos Verdes if we can develop an agreement giving us the right to manage and restore the site. The agreement would simply state that the property is to be preserved in its natural state, would limit modifications to the property as those necessary for restoration and trails, and would provide the Conservancy the right to do the restoration and manage the property on a day-to-day basis. Specifics, of course, would be worked out during discussions. The property would continue to be owned by the City.

An agreement of this type is necessary for us to be able to raise funds from donations and grants, to take advantage of volunteer help, and to avoid costs to the City. A similar approach might be used for other properties the City owns, including the Forrestal property.

We would be happy to meet with you or your designee to begin discussions on how we might make this happen. Please contact me at (310) 336-1135 or the Conservancy's office at (310) 541-7613 to set a time and day for a meeting.

Once again, congratulations on the acquisition of the Shoreline property. We look forward to working with you to create a truly special nature preserve on this property.

Sincerely,

William Ailor, President, PVPLC

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Humphrey Receives Award



Rick Humphrey, right, organizer of our first art exhibit and sale, *Palos Verdes Peninsula: An Artistic Interpretation*, received the Conservancy's Volunteer Service Award at our annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic in November for his work in making this event possible. The award was presented by Conservancy president Bill Ailor.

Humphrey took the show from concept to completion and was one of the three artists who contributed work to the exhibition. The show had over \$10,000 in art sales, a portion of which benefited the Conservancy. Humphrey is now working on the 1998 exhibit--see the page 6 of this newsletter and make plans to attend.

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NCCP Process Produces First Habitat Map

The Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) initiated by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes is continuing to move forward. It appears that the final goal of the program, an approved conservation plan for all of the open space areas in RPV, is within reach. The NCCP approach is designed to protect threatened habitat without depriving landowners of the financial potential of their land.

This past spring and summer the City hired an independent consultant to conduct a series of biological inventories to determine the existence and concentration of endangered and rare species of plants and animals living in the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. While some plant inventories are waiting for spring rains to bring out fragile species, the majority of open space areas in RPV have been reviewed and the species concentrations drawn out on a habitat map.

At the November meeting of the NCCP working group, a map of the environmentally-significant areas was distributed to landowners, City staff, conservation group representatives, and residents in attendance.

The map, the first of three, or perhaps four, maps that the group will contemplate, outlines the fragile and desirable open space areas on the south side of the Peninsula. This "habitat" map, which was created by representatives from the California Native Plant Society, the Audubon Society, and the Conservancy, is probably considered something of a "Wish List," but will provide a useful counterbalance to the developers' "Wish List" map, which will be presented to the group at the January meeting.

With the presentation of the two "Wish List" maps, conversations will begin between landowners, city staff, and resource agencies to draw a practical, workable, and economically feasible compromise. It is expected that an additional map or two will be developed as the details of the compromise are fleshed out. By March, it is hoped that the NCCP working group will have agreed upon a map/plan that represents a satisfactory compromise between the various interest groups represented by the planning process.

This final map/plan is expected to be completed by late spring of 1998 and then will be presented for public review. While there are still a number of hurdles that must be overcome before a final plan is agreed upon, the NCCP working group has made significant strides over the last nine months and is well on its way to providing the community with a land use plan that provides for open space protection and development on the Peninsula.

If you have any questions about the NCCP process, feel free to call the Conservancy or to contact the City of Rancho Palos Verdes regarding the next meeting of the NCCP working group.

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The Community Costs of Sprawl

Sprawling growth patterns are expensive and local governments are discovering - often too late - that they cannot afford the public service costs associated with new development. Since residential development tends to generate the highest amount of tax revenues, it is easy to believe that increasing the tax base by building new houses will result in a net revenue gain. However, communities that seek new development in search of revenue should also remember to look at the expenditure side of the new development equation.

The American Farmland Trust, a national land conservation organization that specializes in farmland protection, recently developed a case-study methodology to assess the property tax contributions of farm, forest, and open space lands. The study, known as the "Cost of Community Services" (COCS) studies, responds to three claims often heard in land conflicts at the local level:

- 1) residential development will lower property taxes by increasing the tax base,
- 2) open lands, including productive farm and forest lands, are interim uses just waiting to be developed to their "highest and best use," and

3) differential (or current) use assessments provide unfair tax breaks to large landowners.

In 40 studies, from Maine to Minnesota, the COCS researchers compared actual revenues and expenditures on a municipal land use basis in a recent fiscal period. Their discoveries were startling. In all 40 cases, open land provided a net revenue surplus while residential development consistently failed to cover costs.

In a series of related studies measuring the effect of all types of new development on municipal tax bills, it became clear that tax bills continue to go up as municipalities become more developed. Even those with mostly taxable commercial properties on average had higher taxes. Clearly, development is not always the financial boon it is made out to be.

Many studies have shown the public service burden that results from sprawling low density development. The COCS studies go one step further to demonstrate the value that productive farm, forest, and open lands can have to a community's tax base. The COCS findings provide a fiscal argument for conservation by showing open space to be a cost-effective use of community land. As a Vermont farmer once said, "cows don't go too school." A Peninsula resident might say the same of Gnatcatchers.

Wendy Millet

Resources: "Conservation is a Community Investment" by Julia Freedgood, Director of Farmland Advisory Services, American Farmland Trust, 1997.

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News on the Conservancy's Environmental Education Partnership

In 1993, the PVPLC joined in an educational partnership with the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District (PVPUSD) and the Southern California Earthquake Center at USC (SCEC) to explore the possibility of offering students real-world experiences in the sciences that went beyond classroom learning.

The focus of the partnership was to help students become scientifically and environmentally literate at a young age via inquiry-based investigations. Because many of society's most pressing problems are environmental in nature and global in scale, the need for citizens who have developed scientific literacy and hands-on experiences with environmental science is essential to finding solutions to these problems is crucial.

Heather White, one of PVPLC's environmental educators, took the lead in developing the program using the open space areas of the Palos Verdes Peninsula as a natural laboratory for investigations. In 1993, in cooperation with a few key teachers, Heather developed curriculum for each grade level that could supplement the learning activities already outlined in the district's science curriculum. She worked with the elementary teachers to plan and implement this five-year science program, conducted teacher training in the local wildlife habitat, and has greatly enriched the science curriculum at the elementary school levels.

All of the activities relate to the natural habitat on the Peninsula. It is hoped that the hands-on activities will not only teach important scientific concepts, but will also foster in the children a sense of connection and concern for the world around them that will translate into a long-term conservation ethic.

The program is well on its way to success and is expected to reach 3,600 elementary school students at all nine elementary schools by the end of the current school year. The program has been so successful that recently, PVPUSD asked the Conservancy to introduce and implement a similar hands-on investigation curriculum at the district's intermediate grade levels.

With this added challenge, the Conservancy was alarmed to hear that Heather was to leave us for a job as a full-time science teacher.

Fortunately, however, we were introduced to Linda Hagerty, who so impressed us that we offered her the job on the spot. Linda grew up on the Peninsula and recently returned after spending time in the Bay



area and the east coast. She has extensive experience working in environmental education and is ideally suited to assume responsibility for the program. Linda will also take on the challenge of expanding the education program to the intermediate grade levels.

We thank Heather for all of the tremendous work that she put in to developing this program, and we welcome Linda to her new role as one of the Conservancy's environmental educators.

By Wendy Millet

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Second Plein Aire Art Show Planned for April 1998

Planning is now underway for the second annual Palos Verdes Peninsula, An Artistic Interpretation, an art show dedicated to the beauty of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The show will open on April 5, 1998 at the Malaga Cove Library, and will feature plein aire paintings by three local artists: Paula Bacinski, Stephen Mirich, and Tim Solliday. A portion of the proceeds from sales of art at the show will benefit the Conservancy.



As in 1997, the upcoming show will feature "plein aire" art-art that is painted "out doors." Artists actually paint on location, and as a result, include much of their experience in their paintings.

The artists are all members of The California Art Club, which was founded at the turn of the century by prominent landscape artists who wanted to capture California's golden landscape in its unspoiled condition. This group was responsible for the major art colonies of Laguna Beach and Carmel, and the upcoming show promises to bring a similar focus to Palos Verdes.

Artist Paula Bacinski's pastels and oil paintings project the brilliance of light, form and color. Her pieces convey a spiritual tone with a deep respect for the landscape. A highly esteemed California Plein Aire painter and resident of Rolling Hills Estates, Paula has won numerous awards and commissions. Her paintings can be found in the corporate collections of Dean Whitter, California Cox Cable Offices, US Trust Towers, Arco Towers, Torrance Memorial Hospital and numerous private collections. Paula is a signature member of the California Art Club and is currently serves on its Executive Board.

Steve Mirich's interest in marine and landscape subjects is due in part to the influence of growing up near the harbor and the open hills of Palos Verdes. In 1986, Mirich moved to Portuguese Bend to surround himself with his source of inspiration. As a plein air painter, Mirich believes there has always been a nexus for the landscape artist and land preservation. Stephen is a signature member and vice president of the California Art Club.

Tim Solliday was born in Iowa. Receiving his art ability from his father, an accomplished technical illustrator, Tim won his first art competition at age fourteen. He went on to study at several art institutions and eventually enrolled at the Lukits Academy of Fine Arts in Los Angeles, where he received his formal classical training with nationally renown artist Theodore Lukits. He has built his reputation as an accomplished figure and still life artist; however, he is best recognized for his plein air landscape paintings. Tim is a member of the California Art Club and has received numerous awards throughout his career.

"This year's show is a continuation of what we tried to do last year," show organizer Rick Humphrey said. "We want to introduce the message of the Conservancy to a whole new audience of art lovers. We have selected some highly-respected artists, each with a significant following, and we will continue to herald the message that art and land preservation are linked together. As we move into the next century it is important that we recognize the value of beauty and open spaces in our daily lives. These are the things that help us to maintain a more civilized society."

Last year's exhibition was a resounding success, with almost 1,000 people viewing the show throughout the month of April. The paintings of the Peninsula were some of the finest ever exhibited, and art sales totaled more than \$10,000. Last year's

artists, Daniel Pinkham, Amy Sidrane, and Rick Humphrey, are currently painting for a whole new show to benefit the Conservancy, which is scheduled for the spring of 1999.

If you would like to view last year's show or see a preview of this year's paintings, go to the exhibition website at: <http://www.pvplc.org/pvart.htm>. For more information, contact the Conservancy office at (310) 541-7613.

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Board Members Re-Elected

Board members Bill Ailor, Shirley Borks, Ken Servis, Allen Franz, Mike Kilroy, Hugh Muller, Eric Randall, and Anke Raue were reelected to two year terms at the Conservancy's October meeting. Bill Ailor was reelected president for 1998, Mike Kilroy and Ken Servis vice presidents, Shirley Borks secretary, and Nell Mirels treasurer. Douglas Stern was reelected to the Board at our November meeting.

Ailor, Palos Verdes Estates resident and director of the Center for Orbital and Reentry Debris Studies at The Aerospace Corporation in El Segundo, was president of the founding Board of the Conservancy and has remained the head of the organization since that time. Ailor was Rolling Hills Estates planning commissioner from 1982 to 1989, represents the City of Palos Verdes Estates on the LA County West Vector Control District, and is a Board member of the Peninsula Symphony Association (he is frequently seen serving coffee at intermission).

He received the Community Association of the Peninsula's Community Service Award in 1997 for his "commitment and accomplishments in the preservation of natural open space on the Palos Verdes Peninsula."

Mike Kilroy has served on the Board since 1991 and as vice president since 1992. Mike's service has been particularly notable for his work as head of the Land Acquisition committee. In this capacity, Mike led the efforts to acquire the 28.5 acre Linden H. Chandler Preserve in 1993 and the 160 acre Forrestal property in 1996. He received the Conservancy's highest honor, our Volunteer Service Award, for his work on the Chandler acquisition. Mike is president and CEO of In-Sync Interactive, a wireless communication company.

Former Rolling Hills Estates Mayor and City Councilman Ken Servis has been on the Conservancy's Board since 1995. Servis served on the Rolling Hills Estates Planning Commission from 1978 to 1989 and on the City Council from 1989 to 1993. He is Dean of Academic Records and Registrar at the University of Southern California.

Shirley Borks, reelected to the secretarial position she has held since joining the Board in 1993, is a retired educator. Borks is well known on the Peninsula, having served on Boards of the Community Association of the Peninsula (CAP), Palos Verdes League of Women Voters, South Bay Audubon Society, the South Coast Botanic Garden Foundation, and the Southern California Regional Occupation Center (SCROC). She has received a variety of awards for her volunteer service, including Torrance YWCA's Woman of the Year in 1988 and the Conservancy's President's Award in 1996.

Former teacher and Rolling Hills Estates City Council member and Mayor Nell Mirels joined the Conservancy's Board in 1990. Mirels served on the RHE Planning Commission for five years and City Council for 17 years, with four terms as Mayor. She (with help from husband Hal) manages the Conservancy's finances and has been treasurer since 1990. Mirels has served on several community Boards, including the Peninsula Friends of the Library, Peninsula Symphony Association, and the Botanic Garden Foundation.

At its November meeting, the Board reelected Douglas Stern to the Board after his unsuccessful run for City Council in Rancho Palos Verdes. Stern is an attorney and partner with Fulbright and Jaworski and has served as a member of the Conservancy's Land Acquisition committee since 1991. He was awarded the Conservancy's highest honor for his work leading to the successful preservation of the Linden H. Chandler Preserve. He was also a principal in the recent preservation of the Forrestal property.

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Notes From The National Land Trust Rally 1997

This fall, PVPLC's Executive Director, Wendy Millet, represented the Conservancy at the National Land Trust Rally in Savannah, Georgia. The conference, which was attended by over 1,000 volunteers and conservation professionals was sponsored by the Land Trust Alliance, an umbrella organization that provides support and information to land trusts throughout the country.

The Land Trust Alliance is a national membership organization of land trusts, working to ensure that local and regional conservation groups have the information, skills, and resources they need to save land through voluntary action. There are over 1,100 land trusts in America, and the number continues to grow each year. Together, these trusts have helped protect about 4 million acres, usually through land donations, purchases, or conservation easements.

During the conference, Millet toured Georgia land protection projects, attended workshops on skills needed in land conservation, and shared ideas with members of other local and regional conservation groups from across the country. "The energy and dedication of the people I met there was truly inspiring," she remarked upon her return. "At one point in the conference, I looked around the room at the 1000+ people there and felt a sense of awe for the impact that these people are making in their communities."

United by a common vision to protect open space areas, land trusts are helping communities preserve natural features that make their areas unique. In some places, this means providing public access and protecting scenic vistas, in others it means saving old growth forests, river fronts, greenways, or agricultural lands. In each case, however, the land trusts are responding to their community's desire to protect the cultural and aesthetic spaces that make their area unique.

Some land trusts use sophisticated financial tools to accomplish their goal, others engage in bake sales and raffles to raise money to protect the part of the community that is loved. Everywhere, the land trust movement seems to be gaining support as a result of its nonconfrontational, community-based efforts to improve a community's quality of life by protecting scenic and recreational lands for people to enjoy and appreciate.

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Future Foggy for Lighthouse Property

According to a recent letter from the Coast Guard, the Pt. Vicente lighthouse is included in a list of thirteen California lighthouses for which the Coast Guard is looking to reduce or eliminate long-term maintenance costs.

The Coast Guard is evaluating four alternatives: (1) no action, (2) outgranting all of the lighthouses on a long-term basis, (3) disposing of all of the lighthouses, and (4) combination of outgranting and disposing. It notes that option 4 is the preferred option. The Coast Guard would continue to operate and maintain the aids to navigation at these lighthouses regardless of the potential changes of land use at the sites.

Potential disposition of the Pt. Vicente property raises several issues for our community, one of which is land use. Developer Jim York would like to include some of the Coast Guard and City Hall property in his hotel/golf course development at Long Point, and the City of Rancho Palos Verdes has agreed to allow Mr. York to include this property in his planning (without committing to approving such a plan).

However, the Coast Guard property contains some excellent habitat and is home to California Gnatcatchers and Cactus Wrens, both on the threatened species list. According to Jess Morton of the Audubon Society, the site is "a critical breeding site for gnatcatchers throughout the Peninsula."

The Coast Guard letter anticipates that "the preferred alternative-Combination of Outgranting and Disposing-would have minimal impacts on the natural or built environment. The action will be documented in a Programmatic Environmental Assessment and is expected to result in a Finding of No Significant Impacts."

It is not yet clear how the various competing interests will resolve the land use and environmental issues raised by the potential action.

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Locale Effects on Plants and Animals

As plants and animals evolve, many factors affect the changes. Among these are genetic mutations (sudden changes in genes), either in living organisms or in seeds or embryos, resulting in morphological (form and structure) changes. Such changes, if favorable to strength, disease resistance, and other characteristics that favor successful parenting, will subsequently aid production of new organisms with those same genetic improvements.

Unfavorable genetic mutations, however, can reduce life's length, and in other ways prevent production of new organisms having those same changes. Mutations are sometimes, but not always, caused by the locale's conditions. Certain other types of change, such as the ones described shortly, are more predictably influenced by locale conditions.

Analyses of snake venoms have shown that there are significant differences among venoms in different locales. For example, a considerable number of venoms in numerous areas of the world are not deadly or even severely disabling to prey which are not indigenous to the locale, even when the snakes are of the same species. A recent study of the Malaysian pit viper (*Calloselasma rhodostoma*) by British biologists has demonstrated that the chemistry, the deadliness and the disabling effects of that snake's venom are related to its diet.

Comparisons among a group of 67 *C. rhodostoma* captured in 36 locales in Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Java consisted of analyses of genes, paleontological history, feces and stomach contents. Those studies showed that diet was the biggest difference between the pitvipers from the 36 locales. The venom had developed to be effective on the specific prey inhabiting each locale, and many of the venoms were not effective on different prey in different locales.

Plants Show Similar Effects

If I were a rainforest plant, I would not want to be removed from the wet forest and then be replanted in an Arizona desert area. If I were a desert plant, I would feel the same way about being replanted in a rainy area in Borneo. Well, how do plants survive in the low, flat areas of the Arizona deserts? They have adapted to the high heat, the strong sunrays, and the occasional, but annually small, water supply.

The rainy season stimulates seed production and development, and with some of the plants, such as the ocotillo, it also stimulates the growth of leaves. The ocotillo, for example, loses its leaves during the lengthy dry season so that internal moisture won't evaporate through leaves.

Cacti preserve their inner moisture in a different way. They have spines instead of leaves, and the structure of the spines is such that inner water will not evaporate through them. Most cacti also are rather chubby in shape, thus protecting the inner contents, and allowing each plant's photosynthesis to occur in the stout green bodies.

There are also desert plants with very lengthy roots. Those are particularly common at sites near streams or near rainy season pools of water where some of the water sinks deeply into the soil. Some plants with deep roots, such as the creosote, also have a set of shallow roots for rapid water absorption during and immediately after rains.

Another adaptation of many desert succulents involves the plants' stomata, which are the leaf openings that allow the emission of oxygen and the absorption of carbon dioxide. In temperate areas, plants open their stomata during the day; but most desert succulents open their stomata at night in order to prevent solar damage, and keep them closed during the day.

By Joseph K. Slap

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Students Henry, Zellner Receive Awards



Alli Henry of Chadwick School and Jason Zellner of Peninsula High School received plaques from Bill Ailor at the August 9 Nature Walk in honor of their service on the Conservancy's Board of Directors as representatives of their respective schools. Henry joined the Board in 1995, Zellner in 1996.

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The Wren's Wish

*T'was the night before Christmas
And on the side of the hill
A cactus wren was stirring
Ruffling feathers 'gainst the chill.*

*The wren was all nestled
In her cactus on the slope
Knowing life was tenuous
But knowing also there was hope.*

*"The Peninsula's changing,"
The wren looked to the sky,
"The places to live are dwindling.
Not much room for me to fly."*

*"But people are working,
The Conservancy at the lead,
To save open space
'Cause they know of my need."*

*The wren shook her head,
Tucked it under her wing,
And wished for a safe home
Where her family could sing.*

*As she drifted to sleep
Holding perch very tight
She thanked people who care
And wished them all a Good Night.*

By Bill Ailor

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