

Open Spaces

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Forrestal Preserved!

With their vote on November 5, the California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) approved final funding for the preservation of the 160-acre Forrestal property as natural open space. This action ends concerns about development of the property, which is a popular area for hiking and one of the most environmentally-significant on the Peninsula.

The property, with approvals for 42 homes and an appraised value of \$13 million, is being acquired by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes using \$4.34 million from LA County Proposition A, passed by voters in 1992, as well as the \$3.4 million approved by the WCB. The difference between the appraised value and the selling price will be considered a charitable contribution by the owners, Diamond Brothers, builder/developers in City of Industry.

We are very pleased and excited that this acquisition has been completed successfully. We began discussions with the land owner nearly two years ago and worked hard for the last nine months to make this happen. We made the original Prop A funding available back in 1992, negotiated the deal, and brought the final funding together. Our organization was established in 1988 to preserve open space like this, and with this acquisition we've preserved nearly 210 acres. It really shows what a determined group of volunteers can do.

Open Space Worth Preserving

The acquisition is significant for our community for several reasons: 1) it preserves a beautiful area; 2) it involves funding sources that have never been used for land acquisition on the Peninsula, sources which may be important for future acquisitions; 3) it puts the Peninsula on the map at the State level as having open space worth preserving; and 4) it shows that our community strongly supports preservation of natural open space.

While the property is now saved, long-term ownership and stewardship issues must be resolved. As it currently stands, the property will be owned by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes, but the Conservancy has offered to assume ownership and the related responsibilities, such as maintenance and restoration of habitat.

We believe Conservancy ownership is a wise move for the community because it removes maintenance and potential liability responsibility from the City of Rancho Palos Verdes and its residents. It also helps us to focus volunteer efforts and helps get grants and additional funding to enhance trails and habitat.

Our current activities on the Chandler Preserve in Rolling Hills Estates provide a model for how we can manage the Forrestal property.

Shortly after assuming responsibility for the Chandler property, the Conservancy established the Chandler Preserve Steering Committee, with members from adjoining homeowners' associations, the City staff, the City's Park and Activities Committee, and interested environmental and community groups. The Steering Committee has provided recommendations to the Conservancy Board and to the City Council on subjects such as signage, trails and maintenance.

It is critical that the City and the local community play a part in establishing an overall plan for the property and in helping us monitor and maintain it. We need the City's help and guidance on many issues related to the property. We need the local residents to make sure the property is watched, is well cared for, and is something the community is proud of.

Over the next several months, we will be working with the City to establish a long-term relationship with regard to the Forrestal property. We are proud of our role in preserving this outstanding natural area. We look forward to providing leadership in its management.

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Three Receive Volunteer Awards



President's Awards to Shirley Borks, June Schwarzmann, and Deena Sheridan (left to right in photo) highlighted an afternoon of fine food and fellowship at the Conservancy's annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic, held on October 6 at the Caballeros Ring picnic area in Rolling Hills.

The President's Award, the Conservancy's highest honor, is presented to those individuals who have made significant contributions to the Conservancy and its mission.

Shirley Borks has been secretary of the Conservancy Board for the last three years, and has taken leadership positions on several activities; most notably, co-chairing the 1996 Picture Palos Verdes Photography Contest.

June Schwarzmann was recognized for her support to Conservancy publications (she assists in the development of all newsletters and brochures) and for her excellent work as co-chair of the 1996 Photography

Competition.

Deena Sheridan laid the groundwork for the Conservancy's Education Program by developing an in-class and nature walk program for use in local schools. She piloted the program in several third grade classes, and worked with parents and teachers to take children on nature walks near their school.

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Wendy Millet Appointed New Executive Director



Wendy Millet, former project manager at the Washington, D.C. based Conservation Fund, has joined the Conservancy as our new Director. She brings solid experience in environmental affairs to the PVPLC, having worked with several groups in the interest of land and space preservation since her graduation from Harvard University in 1990.

While working with the Conservation Fund, Millet served as Project Manager for the Sustainable Use of Land Project established to review 25 years of U.S. land-use policies. Earlier, she worked with the Jackson Hole Land Trust, in Jackson, Wyoming, where she successfully negotiated changes in a new County plan to favor protection and preservation of large tracts of land.

Before joining the Jackson Hole organization, Millet was the Conference Coordinator for the Foundation for Research on Economics and the Environment in Seattle, Wash., an organization that emphasizes economic solutions to environmental problems.

Millet's interest in and commitment to open space preservation comes out of her belief that today's ever-quickenning pace of living must be offset by sanctuaries for serenity.

"I think that there is too little time and too little space for recreation, leisure and simplicity in our lives today," Millet observed. "Protecting open space is a way of creating places where people can go to get some perspective or take a break. I don't know anyone who doesn't feel refreshed after a walk. Part of it comes from the exercise and part- perhaps the greater part - comes from the subtle, almost imperceptible, way we connect with the natural world. We return from a walk a little bit happier, and a little bit more sane."

Our new Executive Director sees exciting opportunities ahead for herself and the Conservancy, not only to help preserve the open space she believes is necessary to one's sense of well-being, but also to serve as an educational link in the community.

Millet believes our Nature Walk programs and the hands-on science projects in the schools are both important ways that the PVPLC can contribute to inspiring present and future leaders to care for the world around them.

Millet declares her position with the Conservancy is exactly what she hoped to find when she and her husband, Rob, moved into the area.

She replaces Kathy McGowan, who accepted a position as an assistant professor at Cal State Long Beach.

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Gloria Anderson Becomes First Office Coordinator



Gloria Anderson, the PVPLC's newly appointed office coordinator, brings with her a wealth of business experience, having held executive positions in advertising, marketing, and public relations with major corporations before her retirement two years ago.

Anderson's volunteer efforts during her working days included two years service on the Los Angeles United Way Budget Allocation Committee and several years as a meet official with the AAU Swim Program.

These days, Anderson spends many hours in the Conservancy's office planning and organizing so that the PVPLC's fast-growing commitments and projects can go forward efficiently, and so that the best possible use can be made of the time given so generously

by directors and volunteers.

Anderson's Sunday mornings are spent at the Farmer's Market at the Peninsula Center where she mans a table loaded with PVPLC literature. Now a prominent fixture at the Market, Anderson started the table last May. She reports that many locals stop to pick up Nature Walk flyers and learn about the Conservancy. She says the reception has been exciting and that it has confirmed her belief that the community really appreciates the work the Conservancy is doing.

A ten-year resident of the Peninsula, Anderson has had an abiding interest in the local environment since her first sight of the area. "I so enjoy living in this beautiful place, and now that I'm retired, I want to do all I can to help sustain it for the pleasure of all the area's residents, and especially for the benefit of the wildlife that lives here with us."

Anderson also serves as the Local Land Use chair for the Peninsula League of Women Voters. "I'm gratified to be able to combine two interests that are so important to me. The League and the Conservancy share many goals," she states, "and I'm pleased to be a conduit for information between the two groups. I can't think of a nicer way to spend one's retirement."

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Land Stewardship: Just Let It Sit?

by Wendy Millet

Some people believe that once natural open space is acquired, it should be easy and cheap to maintain. Just let it sit. Do nothing. Let nature take its course. What could be easier?

Unfortunately, nature's course, in many cases, has been significantly disrupted by past owners and users, and thus the open space does not resemble its original state.

On the Peninsula, non-native plants, grasses, and shrubs have been introduced over the years and have changed the nature of much of our open space. Cattle have grazed the hillsides, large areas have been farmed, and non-native seeds from neighboring gardens have been swept downstream by winter rains and taken root in areas that were previously home to native plants.

Such impacts have favored the spread of aggressive and fast growing non-native plants and annual grasses which spread rapidly and choke out the slower growing native plants. As a result, many areas of the Peninsula have long since lost the flowers and grasses that once were home to our native wildlife.

The Conservancy's restoration program is aimed at creating a management plan for each property that can tilt the balance in favor of the local plants, protect the area from further impacts that could alter the well-being of habitat areas, and help bring the land back to its natural state.

The plan includes guidelines for maintenance, monitoring, restoration, protecting conservation values, community involvement and education, and ensuring adequate funding to protect the property in perpetuity.

To develop such a plan, we must first gather all relevant and detailed information about the property. We must inventory the wildlife and plants over a long period of time, conduct boundary surveys, document and resolve encroachment and dumping by neighbors, establish maintenance guidelines and requirements, coordinate cleanup activities, create a long-range vision for the property, and develop funding opportunities for preserve projects.

We followed this path on the Lunada Canyon and Linden H. Chandler Preserves, where we've established maintenance guidelines, resolved dumping and other issues, and inventoried the plants and animals. This work has provided a foundation for ongoing restoration activities, activities where community volunteers give their time to help change the course of nature in this small area.

If you'd like to learn more about our land stewardship program, please call our office at (310)541-7613. The native plant inventories for the Chandler and Lunada Canyon Preserves are available in the Peninsula Libraries.

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DNA Doings

by Joseph K. Slap

As environmental conservationists, we might want to think of DNA as meaning Do Not Adulterate the environment. However, its meaning in biochemistry, of course, is deoxyribonucleic acid, differing from RNA which stands for ribonucleic acid. Recent DNA studies have greatly expanded its use in various sciences, and have even extended its usage to some other important applications. Let's consider two of those.

In the United Kingdom, there are numerous bird sanctuaries and numerous organizations devoted to the protection of birds. One of the latter, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), collaborated with the British police last year to apply DNA technology to the prevention of the theft of eggs from nests of protected birds of prey.

Some commercial bird breeders had been stealing eggs from nests in the wild, and then processing the eggs so that they hatched. The birds could subsequently be sold or used for future business-purpose breeding. When questioned, such dishonest breeders would claim that their own birds had laid the eggs. After the RSPB collaboration with the police, DNA "fingerprinting" was used to determine whether breeders' claims were valid.

Catching Suspect Breeders

When a breeder became a suspect, the DNA of the hatched birds was compared with that of the birds which the breeders had said were the parents, and when the comparison failed to show any parental-offspring relationship, the breeder was arrested and tried in criminal court. The British courts accept DNA fingerprinting as legitimate evidence, and quite a few breeders have been found guilty of breaking the bird conservation laws, and have been punished.

The DNA technique has significantly reduced the theft of the eggs of wild birds. Also, it has provided a way to identify the unscrupulous thieves without having to catch them in the act of thievery.

Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, etc., have extensively studied their chosen animal species in the animals' natural habitats. In many of the studies, kinship patterns and mating systems have been aspects of those studies. However, it was not always possible to know which animals had mated, and to identify exact "family" relationships.

In the past, applying DNA technology to such studies would have required capturing animals and extracting bodily samples containing DNA. Those actions were not often either desirable or practical. A newly developed method of obtaining DNA does not require either capture or bodily sample extraction.

DNA from Dung

The method involves watching an animal excrete dung, and then obtaining DNA from the dung. This was first accomplished with bears in Europe, and then with olive baboons in Tanzania. Comparisons were made with DNA obtained from hair of the same animals, and consistency was found.

This fecal method now makes it possible to analyze genetic characteristics, kinship relationships, and certain other aspects of the lives and bodies of arboreal animals, endangered animals or others where capture is either difficult or undesirable.

If you want a reason for getting into the details of DNA, just read the following 1949 statement by the great Konrad Lorenz (translated from the original German). "The truths of organic nature are of a charming and awesome beauty, the deeper you penetrate into their details and special features, the more beautiful they become."

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Conservancy Moves to New Office

The Conservancy has moved to new office space at Ridgecrest School in Rancho Palos Verdes. The new office, formerly a classroom, is being rented from the Palos Verdes Unified School District.

The new office is considerably larger than our old office at Valmonte School and provides room for meetings and training sessions. One of the first uses will be to train local teachers as part of the District's "Hands-on Science Curriculum." The Conservancy is providing a segment for this program on local habitat.

If you'd like to visit our office and growing library of land preservation-related materials, please call (310)541-7613 for office hours and directions.

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Wish List

Got a copy machine you're not using? How about a computer table, folding chairs, electric typewriter, filing cabinets, an electric heater, a fan, a radio, or room dividers? We're looking for these and other business office items. Give us a call at (310)541-7613 if you'd consider donating such items to the Conservancy.

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