

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee
Minutes February 26, 2002

Steve Hartman chaired. Also attending were Glenn Bailey, Jack Baylis, Gene Greene, Adel Hagekhalil, Muriel Kotin, Eric Lesser, Joyce MacKinnon, Steve Moe, Jennifer Stein, Chuck Turhollow, Linda Waade, Rosemarie White, and Sandy Wohlgemuth.

After self-introductions were announcements: EarthDay at CSUN; LA/SG Rivers Watershed Council and MWD hosting a watershed conference; Canada Goose EarthDay 4/7 at Chatsworth Nature Preserve. Minutes of the January 28, 2002 were approved as sent. New agenda item: EarthDay event at Lake Balboa.

Sepulveda Wetlands Park, Presentation by the Bureau of Sanitation (Adel Hagekhalil):

Adel highlighted major changes in the Draft Concept Design Report of January, 2002. The name has been changed to reflect what the proposal is: a park. It now includes a soccer field that will be constructed near the education center. Children can be attracted to enjoying nature when they go to the park to play soccer. They intend to pursue state and federal funding. They have applied for funds from Proposition 13. A mailing will be sent by the city to community of an extensive area, inviting people to community meetings. VanOwen to Valley Vista, Kester to Balboa. Glenn suggested going west to White Oak. Perhaps to Lindley.

Rosemarie asked whether this was always to be considered a pilot project; was in not to be a predecessor for a larger project and a temporary thing. Adel replied that the original conceptual proposal was based on 300-500 acres needed, but that this has been scaled back to the 60.9. Prado Dam wetlands are 450 acres in a flood control basin locally (Orange County). At Prado Dam, they close down individual cells, a few at a time and clean them out of silt and surplus vegetation. Rosemarie asked where the rest of the acreage will be. Answer: the 60.9-acre project will be a permanent one, more accurately a "prototype" than a "pilot." As more land is not available in the Sepulveda Basin, modifications are being made within the TWRP instead to remove additional nitrates. This will reduce the capacity of the TWRP, so the wetland park will be a polisher to minimize the reduction in capacity of TWRP. And it will be a pilot project for urban runoff treatment for many areas of the city. Further, state and federal funds are available for natural treatment, but not for water-reclamation plants.

What if the community says the project is a disaster? Sanitation will make every effort to ensure this is an aesthetic, effective, desirable project. But it is permanent. Rosemarie likes the water-treatment aspect of the project, but not its being in the Sepulveda Basin near the Wildlife Area. It is taking up valuable space, and 2 ½ acres more will be lost to soccer field. Eric pointed out that portion was designated for active recreation in the first place.

Joyce questioned the cost of the soccer field. Sandy said too close a soccer field would frighten the birds. It will be on the other side of the baseball fields. Glenn suggested removing the lights from Hjelte Field.

Muriel asked for a comparison with the San Joaquin Marsh. It will be very similar but with added features like boardwalks. The Graphic Plate 4 does not show the Wildlife Area – does not reflect amendments to the master plan. Muriel is concerned about disturbance to the south Wildlife Area from building the pump station and line to the

wetland. Steve H said mitigation will be needed for disturbance. Muriel wondered how mechanical/industrial the trash-removal process at the sediment pond will be. Will that area have any wildlife value? Will it be compatible with the nearby educational center? She said the maintenance budget should include security and funds for removal of invasive exotics like arundo. Maintenance personnel should have some of their time budgeted for low-level security functions. LAUSD should be contacted to see whether it will really be a partner in education programs there. If not, Sanitation should take a major role in the education programs. Muriel also said there should be wildlife observation areas, not blinds. She suggested there should be educational displays (at appropriately low heights) tying the wetlands to the Wildlife Area at both the W.A. and the Wetland Park. She read a letter in support of the Wetlands Park to the LA Times from a 5th-grade class from Toluca Lake Elem that had a fieldtrip to the WA on 2/1/02.

Melanie pointed out that water hyacinths -- shown on Graphic Plate 12 -- are a highly invasive exotic. Is the operational set up of cells similar to San Joaquin Marsh? Yes. What about inundation? It will be a design issue, and cells will be shut down singly for cleaning. Prado Dam does not have board walks. It has a small nature center. She would like to see more detail in the next level about the relationship between the river, creeks and wetlands.

Steve H. was impressed with incorporation of water runoff treatment. How will it work when the runoff is at a lower grade than the wetlands? Pumps. Exactly where the runoff will come from has not been determined yet. This is still a conceptual study.

Melanie is also concerned about the impacts of the pumping station that will be added in the south Wildlife Area (plate 9). Any disturbance will be mitigated. Where will the wetlands-treated water be returned to the river? That will depend on advice from the regional water quality control board.

Eric asked if the pumping of urban runoff is energy efficient? There is an energy cost. The pumps would be turned off in floods. San Joaquin Marsh is an example of treating urban runoff. What about oil, rubber, metals in the runoff? Disposal will depend on what they find. Just how manageable the pollutants in the LAR are by phyto-remediation is one of the purposes of this project as a pilot. Eric emphasized that the wetlands park should be kept simple and without massive structures. *

Sandy commented that the kids from Toluca Lake Elem said the Wildlife Area Lake water didn't smell. They are right; we don't get bad smells there. Why are people objecting to smells? Rosemarie said what about the Japanese Gardens smell? That's the TWRP smelling, not the effluent. Will they use insecticides? No, mosquito fish.

Glenn asked why the many references to 50-75 acres, rather than 60.9. It was kept a range to account for the sports fields and buffers, and it's a CONCEPT report and flexible. Glenn asked if we could get the schedule of public meetings as soon as possible. Yes. Glenn is concerned about siltation, wondering what can be done from design rather than the cleaning out of cells. The map showing the diversion of runoff shows a line from above Bull Creek. Putting the start of diversion slightly downstream might pick up more runoff. Glenn suggested getting mosquito data for now, as there are already mosquitos now, for comparisons later. He is all for environmental centers if not overdone, but is concerned as to whether one will realistically work west of Hjelte Fields. If it's just a political thing, it might not be a wise use of funds. Muriel suggested a shade

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structure with a few informational signs about the wetlands and WA. Jack Baylis said that the educational facility will be designed with the committee, not drawn and then presented to us afterward.

Eric regrets the loss of farmland. If some can remain in the basin, he hopes it will be retained. Glenn commented that the ACOE will be in charge of that. Also, the master plan shown is out of date, but it is the master plan. It might be wise for this committee to discuss updating the master plan with the ACOE.

Steve H said he is personally offended with the name, that "Wetlands Park" is an obfuscation that will lead to distrust. He would prefer "Sepulveda Basin Wetland and Water Filtration Facility" or "Water Treatment Wetlands." Adel said they do consider it to be a park in character, in fact. Glenn would like to see the word "Basin" in the name, regardless of the characterization. CNPS opposes the project as they see it as growth-inducing. Steve H invited Sanitation representatives to come to CNPS's board meeting next week. Melanie emphasized that the city must meet more stringent standards with the amount of buildings we have now. The choice is whether to build wetlands or more treatment plants. In many areas, small wetlands are being built to treat urban runoff, the wetlands planted with rare California native plants. This project could lead to those mini wetlands being created in LA.

Steve Moe asked about the changes being made within the TWRP. A TMDL will be coming down on phosphorus, which TWRP isn't designed for.

Sandy asked who will make the decision. The EIR will be approved by the mayor and city council. Whether to do an EIR will also probably go to the highest level also.

Steve H. asked about the feasibility of putting the water treatment wetlands in the northeast valley to treat the effluent before it is spread for groundwater recharge. If that were done, more people would find that use more acceptable. Adel said that some of the water will still go to the LAR. Melanie said that not too much infiltration can be done safely in the northeast valley without causing contamination from old landfills.

Glenn commented that a dispersed solution for storm water treatment is the new wave, and that this is the beginning of such a movement. He considers it an asset to have this demonstration project in the Basin. It's of reasonable size and compatible with our wildlife and other natural areas. Why has Sanitation not yet met with many of the community groups? Linda Waade said that they held off on some meetings until the concept report came out. They'll give us the community meeting dates as soon as they're available. They'll come to meetings of any of our groups they haven't already met with. www.lacity.org/san has a link to Sepulveda Wetlands Park. Comments in writing are requested.

It was moved (by Melanie Winter) and seconded (by Glenn Bailey) that the Wildlife Areas Steering Committee support the concept of the proposed water treatment wetland in the Sepulveda Basin, and we intend to work closely with the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation in refinement of this concept. The motion was passed with 4 yes votes and 2 abstentions. (Sandy Wohlgemuth was not present at the vote and therefore did not vote.)

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Japanese Garden (Gene Greene): Berm tours will start in a month or two. We should all do a collective event some Sunday.

Recreation & Parks (Steve Moe): This year's Garden Fair is canceled because of budget constraints.

SFV Audubon (Muriel): Cleanup will be Saturday 4/13/02. She will e-mail everyone a flyer when it is prepared. Steve H will be at Hummingbird Hill, directing CNPS's effort.

The River Project (Melanie Winter): She is planning to submit a grant on the Los Angeles River within the Sepulveda Basin between Balboa Boulevard and Hayvenhurst Creek. The Army Corps of Engineers has removed most of the arundo there. Melanie wants to do a study and stream bank restoration to provide bio-engineered stabilization and riparian and semi-upland habitat. (She is looking for a copy of the Bull Creek plan.) **Moved, Seconded and Passed that the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee support Melanie Winter's grant proposal to do a study and stream bank restoration to provide bio-engineered stabilization and riparian and semi-upland habitat on the Los Angeles River within the Sepulveda Basin between Balboa Boulevard and Hayvenhurst Creek.**

Submitted by

Muriel S. Kotin, Member Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee