

Subj: **Draft of Comments - Bull Cr**
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Rosemarie and All,

A draft of my comments follows. I hope to make any changes and send it on to the ACOE before the end of next week. Please let me know if you find any errors or other problems.

Muriel

DRAFT COMMENTS ON The Draft Detailed Project Report and Environmental Assessment/Mitigated Negative Declaration (DPR/EA/MND) for the Bull Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project - Muriel Kotin

September 4, 2005

Ms. Ruth B. Villalobos
 Chief, Planning Division
 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Attn: Dr. Nedenia C. Kennedy
 P.O. Box 532711
 Los Angeles, CA 90053-2325

Dear Ms. Villalobos and Drs. Kennedy and Watt:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment for San Fernando Valley Audubon Society on The Draft Detailed Project Report and Environmental Assessment/Mitigated Negative Declaration (DPR/EA/MND) for the Bull Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project.

We strongly support this project and agree that Alternative 4, the Oxbow Concept, should be the Recommended Plan.

The first section of the following comments will discuss bird species of concern found in the Sepulveda Basin, as our information suggests the restoration of Bull Creek is even more significant than the DPR/EA/MND suggests. The second section gives suggestions for design of the human-use aspects of this project. The third discusses monitoring.

Bird Species: Many more species of birds occur in the Sepulveda Basin than indicated by the DPR/EA/MND, which found no species of concern listed in the California Natural Diversity Data Base or in the Significant Ecological Area Study of Los Angeles County. Whereas Table 3.2-2 of the Draft EA, Wildlife Observed or That May Occur in the

Project Area lists 48 bird species, well over 200 species have actually been seen in the Sepulveda Basin. With the restoration project, most of these species will be equally likely to occur in the project area.

The first paragraph on page 3-13 of the EA should be corrected. Kris Ohlenkamp is president of San Fernando Valley Audubon. His Sepulveda Dam Basin Bird List for 1980 to March 2002 is included at the end of these comments. As Mr. Ohlenkamp's list indicates, the Yellow-breasted Chat is "abundant," seen every year, May - August. This year, an adult Chat was observed feeding young in the Wildlife Reserve, south of Burbank Boulevard, east of Haskell Creek near the pedestrian/maintenance bridge.

While the federal and state endangered least Bell's Vireo appears on Mr. Ohlenkamp's list as rare, it has been seen frequently by many observers in the Wildlife Reserve in the past few years. Many birdwatchers have observed least Bell's Vireos both north and south of Burbank Boulevard this spring and summer, although we are not aware of any evidence of breeding.

In view of the increasing presence of the Yellow-breasted Chat and least Bell's Vireo as well as breeding of the Chat within the Sepulveda Basin, the project is likely to promote future additional nesting by these species.

Other bird species not found on the report's list of "Wildlife Observed or That May Occur in the Project Area" that are on the Audubon 2002 Watchlist of birds of concern do occur in the Basin. Allen's Hummingbird and California Thrasher both breed in the Wildlife Reserve. White-throated Swifts are frequently seen there. Two Black Swifts were seen at Lake Balboa May, 2002. Nuttall's Woodpecker are occasionally observed, while Wrentit and Hermit Warbler are rare. The report lists Tricolored Blackbirds as "may occur" As shown on Mr. Ohlenkamp's list, they are regularly seen throughout the year, mostly near Lake Balboa.

Design Suggestions: San Fernando Valley Audubon leads many public walks and sponsors field trips for around 3,600 school children in the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve (SBWR), a 225-acre portion of the basin that the report does not describe. The Wildlife Reserve, or "Wildlife Area," began in 1979 and was expanded in 1988 and again in 1998. We expect that the Bull Creek Restoration will result in a small but vital second Wildlife Area.

We recommend creating an esthetic tie-in to the Wildlife Reserve, using the same style

of bridges and viewing areas. The three bridges in the Wildlife Area work well and are attractive. The viewing areas are attractive, efficient and low maintenance. They do not harbor flying insects nor encourage people to sleep there. There is one error in their execution that should be avoided in the Bull Creek restoration: the interpretive signs are much too tall and block the view. They were originally intended to be two feet high at the front and three feet high at the back, where they would be readable by children and people in wheelchairs and not block the view.

The pathways/maintenance roads of the Wildlife Reserve work well, but should have been designed with the decomposed granite surface extending to the outsides of the T-gates where pedestrians walk around them when the gates are closed.

The sandstone monuments were poorly designed and a waste of money. As bollards, the short ones are too low to be seen by drivers close to them. They occasionally serve as a place to rest or tie a shoelace, but a few small, simple concrete benches similar in style to those of the viewing areas would be more practical. The large monuments serve no real purpose except the few with etched informational signs, and they are poorly located and their signs inadequately noticeable.

Interpretive signage ideally should include information about the birds, plants, plant communities and water of the site as well as about restoration. In addition, one sign at Bull Creek and another at the Wildlife Reserve should let visitors know about the other location and how to get there.

Location of the interpretive nodes is important. Figure 5.2-4 of the DPR seems to show three, each surrounded by riparian woodland which would preclude viewing more than a few feet away from the node. Except for possibly one node, the nodes should serve as viewing areas and afford views of the creek and/or the oxbow, which will otherwise be blocked from view by the riparian woodland, except from the three bridges.

Limitations on public access to the island, will probably need "to adapt to conditions that develop in the project area over time" as described for operation and maintenance of the habitat area on page 7-16. In the Wildlife Reserve, we have found that the public frequently creates informal pathways to access water bodies for viewing, collecting and playing except where it is physically very difficult to do so. Therefore, we recommend that initially access to the island be blocked off during nesting season by gates that can be opened by maintenance personnel, monitors, and leaders of scheduled walks. The

gates should be located on or near the island side of the bridges to the island, so that visitors can use the bridges for viewing the oxbow and island at all seasons. Of course the gates should be posted with signs explaining why they are closed. Even with the gates, a raised boardwalk with railings on both sides as described on page 5-15 will be desirable.

Monitoring: San Fernando Valley Audubon Society would be the appropriate local organization to lead in assisting with a monitoring program for birds and other wildlife as described on page 7-22. Our president, Kris Ohlenkamp, has led bird walks in the Wildlife Reserve for many years, as well as birdwatching throughout the basin and leading Christmas bird counts there. He can be contacted regarding setting up the program and staffing it with Audubon volunteers. His Sepulveda Dam Basin Bird List 1980-March 2002 with exotic species through 2003 follows these comments.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for clarification of any of these issues or if I can be useful in any way.

Sincerely,

Muriel S. Kotin, Representative to the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee, Youth Activities Chair and Past President

San Fernando Valley Audubon

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2-page bird list follows

