

## **COALITION TO SAVE SEPULVEDA BASIN**

*6902 Aldea Ave. Van Nuys, CA 91406*

*(818) 9966-8846*

### **Sepulveda Basin Urban Wildlife Refuge**

The Sepulveda Basin is a 2,100 acre oasis of federally owned open space in the heart of Los Angeles, the second largest city in the nation. The city's population exceeds 3.5 million residents while Los Angeles county's population exceeds 10 million residents.

The Sepulveda Basin has historically functioned as the back-bone of wildlife habitat areas in the San Fernando Valley. It is the only candidate refuge with 2 1/2 miles of the Los Angeles River running through it's center, one of only three remaining soft bottom sections in the river's 60 mile journey to the Pacific Ocean. The river and it's tributaries within the basin, comprise a functioning "jurisdictional" wetlands system. To date the basin's wetlands have never been delineated.

As large tracts of land within the basin have been converted to active recreational use, wildlife habitat has diminished with the attendant loss of species diversity. Of the basin's 2,100 acres only 108 acres are currently designated for wildlife purposes. In spite of the disparity of land area set aside for wildlife the basin still attracts a wide variety of wildlife including over 200 bird species. A recent grant application prepared by the city Department of Recreation & Parks stated that 10 bird species found in the river corridor are listed as sensitive or endangered. Additional multi-seasonal biological studies should be performed along with an analysis of existing and historical data to provide a more complete and scientific evaluation of the biological diversity and habitat significance found in the Sepulveda Basin. The above requested analysis could be accomplished with existing authorized appropriations available to the Army Corps of Engineers which have not been allocated to specific projects in the Basin.

Of the 2,100 acres within the basin only 250+/- have not been irrevocably committed to active recreation or other uses. Approximately 150 acres are transitionally committed to sod farming of which about 100 acres are undergoing major excavation upheaval for the next 18 month period. A critical 56 acre sod field on the west side of Balboa Blvd. is being proposed for a major entertainment complex and parking lot. This area was one of only two remaining agricultural fields in the basin where migratory waterfowl were observed seeking forage and refuge during the 1992/1993 winter migration.

Twenty years ago the majority of land in the basin was in row crop production of corn. Today approximately 100+/- acres of corn remain in production. Current harvesting procedures are not beneficial to migratory waterfowl populations as all vegetation is plowed under prior to their arrival. Land management practices should incorporate the concept of whether human activity has a beneficial use to wildlife. If new proposed human activity in the basin will be detrimental to wildlife values, it should be discouraged or modified to a level of no net negative impact.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is the appropriate responsible agency to play a leadership role in planning this regions first Urban Wildlife Refuge. The Coalition to Save Sepulveda Basin invites your participation and evaluation of the Sepulveda Basin, as well as the land units identified below, for this worthy designation.

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## San Fernando Valley Urban Wildlife Refuge Opportunities

There are six large publicly owned tracts of land in the San Fernando Valley comprising approximately 7,773+/- acres that should be evaluated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for inclusion in the Wildlife Refuge system. Since these properties are within the second largest city in the United States they are excellent candidates for consideration as Urban Wildlife Refuges. The responsible lead agencies, jurisdictions and approximate acreage of these land units include the following:

- 1) Sepulveda Basin: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks, 2,100 acres.
- 2) Encino Reservoir: Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, 1,073 acres
- 3) Pierce College Farm: Los Angeles Community College District, 240 acres
- 4) Chatsworth Reservoir: Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, 1,350 acres
- 5) Los Angeles Reservoir (Van Norman Dam): Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, 1,560 acres
- 6) Hansen Dam: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks, 1,450 acres

The above areas provide the last remaining quality habitat for a wide variety of wildlife such as migratory waterfowl, songbirds and raptors including Golden Eagles. Mammal populations include badger, fox, deer, coyote and bobcat.

In areas such as the Sepulveda Basin, the lack of defined wildlife management policies has led to a elimination of large blocks of habitat, with the resultant decline or elimination of certain species. If single agency/single mission management is allowed to continue it is a certainty that overall populations of wildlife will continue to decline.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service can provide the necessary level of expertise through a variety of non-acquisition techniques such as memorandums of understandings or technical assistance agreements which will insure a coordinated comprehensive approach to wildlife management. The above described areas, under the umbrella of an Urban Wildlife Refuge classification, will not only continue to provide their primary functions but will also continue to provide their critical biological functions as de-facto wildlife refuges in one of the most densely populated areas in the country. If the Coalition can assist the Service in evaluation of these areas, please do not hesitate to invite our participation.

Sincerely,

Peter Ireland  
President



# San Fernando Valley Audubon Society

*"For the Conservation of Wild Life and Natural Resources"*

## SAN FERNANDO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SEPULVEDA BASIN

San Fernando Valley Audubon Society has been leading monthly bird walks in the Sepulveda Basin since 1977. A little over a year ago our chapter began leading nature walks in the basin for school children and their parents and other groups such as high school science clubs. We have long had a continuing interest in the future of the basin and protecting it as open space. The chapter is represented on the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee and the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Consortium.

We hope to see the Sepulveda Basin further restored as a haven for birds and other wildlife, while providing an island of open space in our very urban San Fernando Valley and being a critical link in the chain of publicly-owned open spaces remaining in the valley. We want the basin to serve as a key education center for teaching people about wildlife and the need to care for wildlife and the environment.

We hope to greatly expand the acreage set aside for wildlife, planting the present and future wildlife areas to provide the most productive possible habitat. Additionally, we want to restore habitat along the Los Angeles River and its several tributaries that flow through the basin. This includes studying the feasibility of diverting some of the treated water from the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant to the various watercourses. We oppose building more structures in the basin, including those proposed for Arts Park L.A., with the possible exception of a few more restrooms. Within and bordering areas used for recreation, we wish to plant trees and shrubs that will enhance wildlife value as well as human enjoyment.

We want to manage the wildlife areas to maximize diversity of habitat for two reasons. First, a variety of plant communities and birds is desirable for educational purposes. Second, since it is not clear what will work best in our very unnatural basin, using artificially reclaimed water, our chances of success will be greater. However, it is clear that creating and enhancing riparian and aquatic habitats will be important elements in the wildlife management plans.

We are aware of the need maintain a delicate balance so that people do not disturb wildlife and habitat. Careful physical design and monitoring will be necessary. Docents, exhibits and signs will be needed to educate visitors about the wildlife and their habitat, both to expand their horizons and to guide their behavior.

We will need help in developing adequate programs for these goals, especially since we are adjacent to a crowded urban environment. We will also need great expertise and flexibility to develop and adjust restoration plans as they are implemented. Necessarily, the basin's function as a flood control basin always has to be considered. We need to learn how to keep the use of recycled water productive and safe to humans and wildlife. We need to learn how to regulate water levels to encourage shore birds without causing mosquito problems. We need to learn what to plant in this basin with its temperature extremes and long periods of drought interrupted by winter rains and occasional inundation.

Submitted by Muriel Kotin, President Elect

June 5, 1993



# SIERRA CLUB

San Fernando Valley Group/Angeles Chapter

P.O. Box 197  
Reseda, CA 91337

June 1, 1993

FOR: SEPULVEDA BASIN  
URBAN WILDLIFE REFUGE WORKSHOP  
JUNE 5, 1993

## A VISION OF THE HIGHEST & BEST USE FOR THE SEPULVEDA BASIN

TO REMAIN FOREMOST A FLOOD CONTROL BASIN... to catch, retain, and absorb some of the hundreds of acre-feet of runoff that come roaring down the Los Angeles River during our infrequent but nevertheless inevitable episodes of intensive winter rainfall.

But during the other 99+% of the time when flood control is not occurring, the highest and best use of the Basin recognizes its **NATURAL** and **OPEN SPACE** values:

- \* a last vestige of expansive, semi-natural landscape on the Valley floor in the midst of built/paved urban surroundings;
- \* a locale where the fertile Valley soil, supporting rich farming activities throughout the Valley in the early century, is recognized through maintaining several fields as agricultural demonstration areas (crops) which are compatible with other Basin uses;
- \* a haven for birds and waterfowl--for both local and migratory species;
- \* a showcase for plant communities native to the San Fernando Valley and surrounding hills, including Oak Savannah, riparian, and wetland;
- \* a Valley-wide environmental education/wildlife observation area for school children and grown-ups alike;
- \* a locale where certain active and passive recreation activities not requiring significant built improvements can co-exist with the natural wildlife habitat;
- \* a protected total system (Basin-wide) of natural open space/wildlife habitat (additional buildings and paving should be kept out of the Basin--this unique remaining area should not be squandered for built uses that belong outside the Basin);

SEPULVEDA BASIN  
URBAN WILDLIFE REFUGE WORKSHOP  
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\* a flood control basin which hosts an URBAN WILDLIFE REFUGE that is one of several so designated and managed on public land around the Valley to form a network in a region where so much riparian habitat has been lost due to development.

The Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club and its San Fernando Valley Group have had a long history of concern and involvement with maintaining and protecting the open space and wildlife values in the Basin. A resolution passed by the Executive Committee of the Angeles Chapter, Sierra Club, on March 18, 1993 states that:

The Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club urges the Army Corps of Engineers to prepare a wildlife management plan for the Sepulveda Basin, and that the Sierra Club participate actively in the preparation of such a plan.

The Chapter, in its March 22, 1993 letter to Colonel R.J. VanAntwerp of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, goes on to state: "We are concerned that the plan be adequately funded, be comprehensive, and include the entire Sepulveda Basin."

The time to act in a comprehensive manner on behalf of natural areas and wildlife in the Sepulveda Basin is **now**. Preparation of a wildlife management plan and designation of an "Urban Wildlife Refuge" are critical steps toward the realization of a hopeful future for wildlife and an educated/aware citizenry in the megalopolis that is Los Angeles.

--Eric M. Lesser  
Chair  
San Fernando Valley Group  
Angeles Chapter, Sierra Club

cc: Dick Hingson, Conservation Coordinator,  
Angeles Chapter

Willis & Melba Simms, Conservation Co-Chairs,  
San Fernando Valley Group

ACHIEVING HIGHEST AND BEST USE FOR THE BASIN  
THROUGH RIPARIAN RESTORATION

Friends of the Los Angeles River  
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The Sepulveda Basin is an important element of the Los Angeles River System. Flood control, water conservation and recreation are key functions of the Basin within the River system. The Basin also harbors one of the last remaining and richest natural portions of the LA River and of riparian habitat in the County. Likewise the Los Angeles River is an important part of the Sepulveda Basin.

Friends of the Los Angeles River believes that multi-objective management of the Basin should focus on the constraints and opportunities fundamental to the riparian system from which it was created.

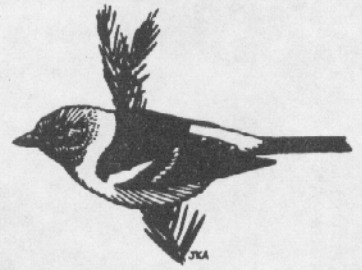
Restoration of riparian habitat within the Basin should be a priority. The recently completed biological inventory, Biota of the Los Angeles River, documents the unique variety and density of wildlife in the River as it flows through the Basin. Clearly, the River offers a valuable opportunity for habitat enhancement. Restoration in the Basin should also be focused on the River's tributaries, including Bull Creek, Haskell Channel and Encino Creek. Another area which offers great potential for wildlife enhancement is the land on either side of the River just below Sepulveda Dam. Transportation officials have expressed interest in this land as a maintenance and storage site as commuter and light rail is developed in the San Fernando Valley.

Restoration should include removal of exotic species in conjunction with the planting and maintenance of native species. One opportunity to remove invasive species is the Army Corps of Engineers proposal for shoal removal from the River behind Sepulveda Dam. Presently, this removal, being proposed to keep the dam gates from being clogged during a flood, would be indiscriminate and destructive and would set a threatening precedent. Selective removal, however, of exotic species could achieve flood control and wildlife goals -- another example of the need for multi-objective approaches to managing the River and the Sepulveda Basin.

Riparian restoration of the Sepulveda Basin would provide desperately needed wildlife habitat and also compatible educational and recreational opportunities, without compromising the concurrent functions of water conservation and flood control.

To further ensure the effectiveness of the Basin's water conservation and flood control goals, paved surfaces (including channelization) and structures must be minimized.

The re-creation of a healthy riparian system in the Basin could ultimately act as a nucleus from which native species begin to encroach on and re-green the surrounding urban area, connected in part by the River and its tributaries.



## los angeles audubon society

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June 5, 1993

I remember the Sepulveda Basin when it was a quiet, almost undiscovered place in the San Fernando Valley. We may regret the passing of the quietness, of the undisturbed sweep of cornfields that fed the wintering geese. We may regret the time when Burbank Boulevard was not yet there with cars whipping through the heart of the basin at freeway speed. We may regret the loss of 154 acres of open space replaced by busy Lake Balboa Park. But these changes are giving many people things they want: fishing and boating, more picnic sites, more play areas, a Woodley golf course.

The essential character of Sepulveda must be preserved through all the changes - the opportunity to have an unstructured outdoor experience; to walk, to jog, to fly a kite, to ride a bike or just to sit on a bench in the shade and read a book. It is also a place to enhance the native plants and increase the diversity of creatures in the present Wildlife Reserve. We look forward to the possibility to expand wildlife habitat to other suitable areas throughout the basin; sod farms, for example, or the 40-acre cornfield east of the Hjelte baseball fields.

We would like to see tributaries of the Los Angeles River - Woodley and Hayvenhurst channels, Encino and Bull Creeks - developed as thriving riparian courses. Bull Creek is historically a genuine wildlife corridor offering in spring and fall a splendid avenue for migrating ~~birds~~ songbirds. Dale Pierce, biologist with the Corps and later with the USFWS said in 1981 that, despite the trash and litter, "...this creek has considerable resource value and should be preserved and enhanced."

If we do the right thing we can have it all.

Sandy Wohlgemuth  
Conservation chair





## THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

### Opportunities for Water Conservation and Habitat Landscaping in the Sepulveda Dam Basin

Lawns and gardens are easier to maintain in the damp English climate (with a latitude identical to that of Vancouver, Canada, where the annual rainfall is over 50") than in southern California where the average rainfall is 15" per year. However, Californians do love their "English" gardens and therefore must deal with limited water supplies by implementing water conservation and water reclamation.

As part of the construction of the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant in the Sepulveda Dam Basin, the City of Los Angeles created a Japanese Garden to demonstrate the value of reclaimed water for landscaping purposes. However, few homes have access to reclaimed water. In order to promote water conservation, then, it would be appropriate for the City to demonstrate the landscaping value of native plants, which, having evolved in this area, can survive with natural rainfall amounts.

The California Native Plant Society recommended to the City that it should use only native plants to landscape the berm being built around the Tillman Plant, and the City agreed to what will be largest native plant project the City has ever undertaken. Moreover, by selecting plants which grow naturally in the Santa Monica Mountains, City landscape architects have, in effect, extended the Wildlife Areas by creating additional habitat for our native fauna.

This could be considered the start of a new trend in what could be called "habitat landscaping". Why select an elm or a eucalyptus when a sycamore or an oak would do? Why choose a *Raphiolepis* when we could have *Ceanothus* - the California lilac. Why cover hillsides with the red berries of *pyracantha* when a *toyon* could be planted? Indeed, why not replace all non-native species with native species in appropriate areas within the Basin?

Starting off with the eastern portions of the basin, adjacent to the Wildlife Areas, whenever the opportunity arises to plant or replace a groundcover, shrub, or tree, the City should plant only native plants. In this way, even though the recreation uses would remain the same, over 20 or 30 years it would be possible to create a landscape with endemic habitat value. Implementation of this policy should not cost too much more than current policy, and certainly the costs of learning how best to maintain natives will be offset by the reduction in water expense. This would be a valuable example for the public, and an opportunity to promote the benefits of landscaping with native plants.

-by Steve Hartman

## Canada Goose Project I

The Canada Goose visits southern California every year between October and April- seemingly in ever decreasing numbers. San Fernando Valley Audubon has sponsored an extensive six-month study of the birds, to determine if such a decline is actually occurring and what, if anything, we can do to prevent it. This year's project gives numbers (between two and three thousand), patterns (daily resting and foraging movements), and locations.

The few remaining open spaces in the San Fernando Valley are therefore critically important to the protection and preservation of this migratory phenomenon. Under study are: Los Angeles Reservoir, Hansen Dam, Encino Reservoir, Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area, Pierce College and Chatsworth Reservoir. No comprehensive plan has been formulated as yet, with the exception of the Urban Wildlife Refuge concept.

The Canada Goose Project was nurtured through the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee of the Department of Recreation & Parks of the City of Los Angeles. The project will continue in the 1993/1994 migration period and we welcome interested persons who might like to be involved, to contact Dr. White through the Wildlife Committee (meetings are the third Tuesday of the month) or through the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society.

Rosemarie S. White, Ph. D.