

Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee

Minutes July 24, 2001

The meeting was chaired by David Ecklund. Attending were Glenn Bailey (Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains); Carvel Bass (Army Corps of Engineers); Jack Baylis (CH2M Hill); Bob Birk (LA City/Mgr Tillman Plant); Gene Greene (Japanese Garden/Bur of Sanitation); Chris Harris (Harris & Co/City of LA); Muriel Kotin (San Fernando Valley Audubon); Joyce MacKinnon (SFV Audubon); Denny Mengel (CH2M Hill); Steve Moe (LA Dept Rec & Parks); Kris Ohlenkamp (SFV Audubon); Carol Plotkin (BREC); Gerald A. Silver (Pres. Homeowners of Encino); Bill Straub (City of LA Bur of Sanitation); Rosemarie White (Canada Goose Project); Sandy Wohlgemuth (L.A. Audubon); Maychelle Yee (Councilwoman Miscikowski's rep).

Minutes of the June meeting were approved without change.

Water-Treatment Wetlands Project: Bill Straub of the Bureau of Sanitation introduced a slide presentation by Jack Baylis, designer for CH2M Hill, on their plan for constructed treatment wetlands in the Sepulveda Basin to improve the quality of effluent released by the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant (TWRP). A driving reason is regulatory requirements. Starting next year (effective 6/30/02), the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRWQCB - LA Region) is ratcheting down the allowed amount of nutrients in the water. The Integrated Planning for Wastewater Treatment process (IPWT) is involving citizen stakeholders in future policy. Unlined areas of the LA River now have habitat because of effluent discharges. Benefits include water-quality improvement, wildlife habitat and ecosystem support, recreational and educational opportunities. The operations of the Army Corps of Engineers in the Basin would not be affected.

The plan is preliminary. The project will not go forward without support of all the interested groups that use the Sepulveda Basin. The project will provide community benefit through multi-purpose use and will complement existing ecological renewal and recreation. Area 7 is farmland now. Want to reduce nutrients (N) to River, determine viability of urban runoff (stormwater) treatment, provide habitat and wildlife restoration. IPWT effort is related to the goals of this project. We're in initial concept stage of this project, and it needs consensus of the groups involved. The feasibility study is from a technical viewpoint only. Natural wetlands processes reduce nitrogen and improve water quality as cattails and bulrushes absorb pollutants.

The original feasibility study's areas 1 and 2 have been removed because of other uses, existing and proposed. Everything else has been modified. They have added an area 8, below the dam. The project has been reduced to 300 acres, with the idea of starting only with a demonstration project in area 7 and the upper part of area 5 (the corn maze area). That amount of area would treat 5 - 10 mg/d. You need 10 acres for 1mg/d as a traditional rule of thumb. They will introduce a new wetlands technology (vertical flow) that may multiply effectiveness 10-fold. They're also looking at technologies within TWRP. What about reverse-osmosis in-plant? This would use lots of expensive energy and cost more.

Kris Ohlenkamp commented that he feels the only acceptable areas for wetlands are the 2 proposed for the demonstration wetlands. Also that he takes about 1,000 people on birdwalks through the Wildlife Area annually while Muriel Kotin takes about 3,000 schoolchildren. Rosemarie White expressed concern that the eastern portion of area 5 is the only area that migratory Canada geese and other geese forage in, that there is a need for this committee to work directly with the planners on wildlife issues. Jack Baylis and Denny Mengel gave their word (for CH2M Hill) that would be the case. The city is adamant on getting support from environmental and community groups. The IPWT stakeholders want to see as natural and inexpensive solutions as possible. There are also negative perception of "sewer water", swamps and loss of recreational areas. Would this area smell like the Tillman Plant? Muriel commented that the areas proposed for the demonstration would be wonderful as wetlands, but only those areas. She is also highly concerned about mosquitos; the wastewater treatment ponds at Irvine's San Joaquin Marsh are lovely and superb bird habitat but swarm with mosquitos at nightfall.

300 acres is the estimated amount needed to treat the current outflow from TWRP. TWRP's 80 mg/d capacity will probably be exceeded around 2020.

Carvel Bass said that water-treatment ponds exist elsewhere in ACOE areas in So Cal, especially Orange County: Prado Flood Control District. ACOE's planning department (Ruth Villalobos' division) has a staff person, Lois Goodman, who has been assigned to work with CH2M Hill on this project. An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be necessary. Jerry Silver inquired how this use fits with the Basin Master Plan. No, it does not fit into the 1982 picture of the Master Plan. But perhaps it will be proved compatible in the EA process. Perhaps the 60-acre demonstration project will be compatible. Glenn Bailey inquired of Carvel if at Prado Dam or any other place, the amount of sediment deposited in a flood event is equivalent to that deposited near Burbank Blvd. and Woodley Ave. by Basin flood events. The Santa Ana River goes through the Orange County (OC) ponds and a creek through the San Joaquin Marsh. The floods cause a lot of trouble, but there is ongoing maintenance. Carvel doesn't know the cost. Jack Baylis offered to make visits to the OC and other wetlands with us to learn more. Glenn commented that the 10-, 20-, 50-year floods seem to occur much more often than their names would indicate, and that they leave damage and sedimentation that it takes Rec and Parks quite some time to repair. The cost and down-time would be significant. Jack Baylis replied that the wetlands will be designed to handle the floods, but Denny Mengel said that the sediment load on leaves of plants may kill them. In response to Sandy Wohlgemuth's questions, Carvel said that the Prado Dam area has a great deal of diversity of wildlife. Sandy asked about mudflats and shorebirds. Denny said that they could work with us to design for very shallow areas to provide for the shorebirds.

Jerry asked how much effluent TWRP puts out, since the report says 80-120 mg/d. That's incorrect, it's 65 mg/d at present. Jerry said that long-term plans are to go up to 200 mg/d with Tillman stages 3 & 4. Bob Birk said that now it's average 65 mg/d in dry weather, higher in wet. Jack said the study is incorrect on the amount of effluent.

In response to Muriel's concerns we were assured that we will not be blindsided in having the project expanded beyond the areas discussed now (the farmland southwest of the River and east of Hjelte Field and the Corn Maze area). Muriel said it will be important that the wetlands have good public access, attractive and natural-looking design, and no bird deterrents.

Jerry suggested that this group be involved with the IPWT steering group. He is concerned that the San Fernando Valley's interests have not been well represented on that group. Is everyone invited to the IPWT steering committee meeting on August 27? No, it is for the IPWT steering committee members.

Rosemarie spoke with Melanie Winter earlier today. Rosemarie proposes we have a meeting of the valley with all of the environmental groups and CH2M Hill, inviting also Dorothy Green, FoLAR, etc. Rosemarie does not feel that homeowners in areas distant from the SFV can represent us. She feels shut out of the process. Jack Baylis said that our Wildlife Areas Steering Committee has had by far the most elaborate presentation on this project.

Tape Drive form and stand is very popular and has a lot of public support. Carol said that the Basin deserves to have integrity and there should be lots of public meetings including all of the groups with an interest. Carol spoke with Lori Fernand at Brad Sherman's office today. Lori is very interested in this project. Jerry expressed great concern about the history of the TWRP being built over the ACCR's objections. Steve concurred: the farmland in the basin is a great temptation to the decision maker. The city will use the cheapest land it can.

Need for User's Committee Meeting on The Wetlands Proposal Rosemarie moved that we ask James Ward to have the next the User's Committee meeting well publicized, the topic being to explain, describe and discuss this project within the next 2 or 3 weeks. Jerry suggested a Web page. Steve Moa suggested that we also ask California to provide the representatives. Glenn said that the expanded mailing list that includes local homeowners organizations be contacted. Rosemarie will call Dorothy Green and Melanie Winter and Brad Sherman's office. Dave Ecklund will contact James Ward on the date. Chris Harris will notify the pilots.

Muriel will miss the August meeting. Steve will be there then with next meeting.

Submitted by

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

On September 1, 2001, the Sepulveda Wetlands Concept Design Draft Technical Memorandum No. 1 dated July 2001 will become available to the public. Muriel complained that we involved members of the public should be allowed to read the "drafts" as drafts promptly and give input before the further stage of report. Gene Greene commented that the day after our June meeting he gave a copy of the report to James Ward's secretary and said it should be copied and sent out to all WA Steering Committee members. It was an error that we did not get it.

Bob Birk said that storm water cleanup is going to be the next big challenge. The wetlands project will potentially help with that problem also. Denny spoke about the multi-purpose aspects of this pilot project. Jerry worried that a pilot project implies and generally proceeds a larger project. Denny replied that what is learned can be applied elsewhere.

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Carol Plotkin of BREC, who used to work for Tony Beilenson, commented that the Basin represents the last open space in the SFV, that the skepticism being heard in this room is understandable. Bringing in people after the fact does not add to a feeling of good faith. Jerry commented that the Tapia Bros farm and stand is very popular and has a lot of public support. Carol said that the Basin deserves to have integrity and there should be lots of public meetings including all of the groups with an interest. Carol spoke with Lori Fernand of Brad Sherman's office today. Lori is very interested in this project. Jerry expressed great concern about the history of the TWRP being built over the ACOE's objections. Glenn concurred: the free land in the basin is a great temptation to the decision makers. The city will use the cheapest land it can.

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Muriel will miss the August meeting. Glenn will become chair with next meeting.

Submitted by

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