

December 26, 2012

To all whom it may concern:

This week the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) laid waste to the South Wildlife Reserve in the Sepulveda Basin. What has taken nature 30 years to develop has been destroyed in one week by a mechanized blitzkrieg assault by the Corps. The public, including the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee, had no official notice of the plan for the immediate devastation of critical habitat nor made aware of the magnitude of the catastrophic short term consequences of its implementation.

The Corps of Engineer's original development plan for the south Reserve consisted of four management areas: a grassland habitat; riparian woodland associated with streamsides and floodplain; coastal sage scrub; and aquatic habitat. These areas were planted from 1979-1984.

The immediate devastation inflicted by the Corp's recent activities must be seen to truly comprehend the disaster that has been done. Urgent steps must be taken to stop the immediate clear-cut activities and prevent even greater habitat destruction.

Under the guise of a "Vegetation Management Project" the Corps has indiscriminately removed nearly all of the vegetation (native and non-native) that has provided food, shelter, and breeding habitat for thousands of migratory and resident birds for many years. The Corps 1) avoided public input in the planning process, 2) published a "No Significant Impact" document which included serious errors, omissions, and misrepresentations of fact and intent and that claimed there would be no significant environmental impacts, 3) failed to notify well-known organizations which have supported the Wildlife Area for many years of their findings, 4) allowed insufficient opportunity to respond to the plan, 5) ignored constructive comments from responsible organizations which were provided once the plan was discovered and, 6) acted precipitously to decimate the vegetation and prevent actions which would preserve native plants.

The Corps plan of completely eliminating the vegetation, spraying herbicides for the next 5 years, changing a naturally evolving, low maintenance habitat dominated by diverse native vegetation into an unnaturally open mono-culture of salt grass, will require many years for the habitat to recover, and will create a large, unsightly scar on the Wildlife Area. In fact, the devastation will be so complete that it will be a decade or more before the area can even be considered a "Wildlife Area".

The "Vegetation Management Project" called for selective removal of non-native trees and shrubs, trimming of native trees, and removal of dead limbs and debris along Haskell Creek, the berm along Burbank Blvd., and within 50 feet of the Dam structure. Instead, they removed nearly all of the vegetation (including many mature native Cottonwoods and Willows) in approximately 80 acres of the Wildlife Area, completely destroyed and filled in the Pothole Pond, and created several new "access roads". Many of the trees and native plants that were taken out were in an area previously planted as mitigation for a Tillman Plant project. The decomposed granite trails, signs, trail markers and stone structures have been destroyed or removed. Tens of thousands of dollars of public money spent on these improvements has been plowed under in one week of needless destruction.

The "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) is full of inaccuracies and omissions. The Corp's stated mission of environmental stewardship with a long term objective of restoring the Basin's native habitat is apparently hollow.

Call Congressman Brad Sherman and let him know what you think.

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