TOYON Reaches Volume 30

By Steve Hartman, Editor

Our Los Angeles-Santa Monica Mountains Chapter of CNPS was founded as the Sierra Santa Monica Chapter in 1967. The earliest newsletter that I have on file is from March-April 1983 (Vol. 3 Number 2). I took over as newsletter editor in September 1983 and continued on until Betsey Landis took over in 1993 for her own decade-long service to our chapter. The baton was passed back to me in 2003. At times I’ve had some layout help, especially from Nancy Cohen (2003-2006) and also from Terry Bavaro. During my time as editor, the TOYON led the way in technological innovations: the first CNPS newsletter to be printed with a dot-matrix printer and “paste-up” and then the first to use desktop publishing that printed full pages, but still required providing the printer with camera-ready art. Those days are gone too; now after I circulate a PDF proof to Jo Kitz, Betsey Landis, Snowdy Dodson, Halli Mason, Sheila Braden and sometimes others, I email the final PDF to The Printing House in Encino, get a Fax proof, and then the newsletters are printed. Snowdy picks them up and then applies the labels provided by our membership chair David Hollombe, and then she prepares and delivers them to the post office. The deadline for articles going in the TOYON is the end of the first week of the month before the edition (Feb 5 is the deadline for the March-April issue).

As I look back at over 150 issues, a few member authors stand out: Jo Kitz has always been the source of most of the announcements and event notices, originally by paper and now by email; David Hollombe has contributed articles about various botanical personalities; Betsey Landis has written many interesting articles from land surveys (Mission Canyon) to fires; Halli Mason has provided many a clever article; Dave Brown has kept us informed of conservation issues; Margaret Huffman wrote a number of fascinating articles; George Stevenson contributed; Doris Hoover updated us with exotic exotica; and in the 1980s we ran a series of articles about families of California plants written by Nancy Dale. As editor it is a good thing to have consistent contributors. But for awhile now our chapter newsletter hasn’t had a regular conservation column, and that would be very valuable. I don’t think one person has to write all the articles; what would be a help is if chapter members – who have intimate knowledge of and perhaps years of experience along a particular trail or in a particular wild land – could send me write-ups (they don’t have to be long) describing the conservation status of the area and/ or reports about wildflowers and plant species. Email me at naturebase@aol.com.

Happy Holidays and Hope For Rain!

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

of the Los Angeles/Santa Monica Mountains Chapter

January 12, 2010 – 7:30 - 9:30pm
Sepulveda Garden Center, Encino

The Importance of Flower Color: The Art and Science of Petal Rubbing
(with notes on insect-flower relationships)

Presenter: Steven Kutzer - entomologist/ botanist, community college teacher, artist

Flower color may be an indicator of the physiologic condition of a flower and petal rubbing may help with taxonomic identification. Three main compound groups determine flower color. Flower pigments can be separated using simple paper chromatography. The pH of the flower and other factors will influence the color of some flowers. The color and shape influences animal visits and plant pollination. The artist can use natural floral pigments to create art. The petals and flower parts may be rubbed on paper or used with water and a brush to produce fine art. A digital photo is taken to preserve the art. Examples of insect-plant relationships, petal rubbing (with an emphasis on native plants), chromatographs, and flower petal art will be shown.

February 9, 2010 - 7:30 - 9:00pm
First United Methodist Church, Santa Monica

Floral Walkabout in Australia
Botanic Gardens to the Outback

Presenter: Steve Hartman

Steve Hartman will lead a down-under visual tour, starting in Sydney (Royal Botanic Garden), then to Perth in Western Australia (King’s Park, Wireless Hill, Ellis Brook Reserve and elsewhere), and end up in tropical North Queensland (Atherton Tablelands, Daintree River, and Cairns). Western Australia is one of five places on earth with a tropical climate and is similar to the Santa Monica Mountains in many ways. Steve and his wife Leslie have visited Australia twice, most recently in October 2009, which is spring in Australia. This power point presentation will focus on flora, but also include wildlife and scenery. Steve Hartman has been member of the California Native Plant Society since 1974, has served on the CNPS State Board of Directors as Treasurer for over a decade, and was honored as a CNPS Fellow. Steve’s activities in the Los Angeles / Santa Monica Mountains chapter include serving as chapter president, treasurer, newsletter editor, webmaster, and plant sale co-chair.

Programs are free to the public. Refreshments will be served. For directions, see Calendar of Events on page 3.
UPCOMING EVENTS

MALIBU GARDEN CLUB MEETING
Wed. Jan. 6, 2010, 7:00 p.m.
City of Malibu Biologist, Craig David, will speak on the new 2010 state and local landscape and irrigation regulations; he will also present information on native and invasive plants. Meeting will be held at The Club House - Pt. Dume Club, 29500 W. Heathercliff Rd., Malibu.
Email: malibugardenclub@gmail.com
Phone: 310-753-8219
Website: www.malibugardenclub.com

PROPAGATION WORKSHOP
Los Angeles County Malibu Forestry Unit
January 21, 9:30 - noon.
Tom Hayduk, formerly of the Soka Native Plant Nursery, will show us how to start plants from seed and from cuttings. Ron Durbin and Alex Stein of the Los Angeles County Fire Department are hosting the session at the Malibu Forestry Unit in Calabasas. Plants will be used in Mountains Restoration Trust's restoration and enhancement projects at Cold Creek Preserve, Malibu Creek State Park and Topanga State Park. Enrollment limited. $5.00 for supplies. Pre-registration required at jkitz@mountaintrust.org or 818-591-1701 x203.

NATIVE PLANT LANDSCAPING SYMPOSIUM
Feb. 20, 2010 - Camarillo
On Feb. 20, 2010, the Channel Islands Chapter of CNPS will present an all day Native Plant Landscape Symposium focusing on planning, planting, and caring for your native landscape. The event will be in the new Barn next to the historic Camarillo Ranch House (just off Highway 101, Camarillo), 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Speakers include: the knowledgeable and highly regarded Bart O'Brien, Senior Staff Research Associate, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden; the delightful and informative Carol Bornstein, coauthor of California Native Plants for the Garden, horticulturist, garden designer; sustainable garden "wise guy", Owen Dell speaking on "Sustainable Landscaping: A Visionary Look at the Future of Gardens"; the dynamic and humorous Richard Halsey, founder of the Chaparral Institute; the also-verknowledgeable and ever-helpful Barbara Eisenstein, Horticultural Outreach Coordinator, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, speaking on "Creating a Wild Suburbia with California Native Plants"; and Ojai Oak expert Michael Inaba, Arborist with Inaba Horticulture, speaking on caring for and planting around oaks. $45 for CNPS members, $60 for nonmembers. For more information and to register go to cnpsci.org.

MUSHROOM FORAY AND PICNIC
Save the Date Sat. March 27, 2010
Florence Nishida will lead us on a hunt for the mushrooms and fungi of the Santa Monica Mountains at the Salvation Army Camp (behind Tapia Park off of Malibu Canyon Rd.). We will have a chance to look at spring wildflowers and enjoy a picnic lunch hosted by the Chapter.

INTRODUCTION TO FUNGI:
BEGINNING MUSHROOM IDENTIFICATION, A 2-DAY WORKSHOP
Instructor: Florence Nishida, M.S.
Dates: Feb. 27 & 28 (Sat & Sun.)
Location: Mountains Restoration Trust - Headwaters Corner at Calabasas
Fee: $165 (both days are required) *

Day one (9am to 2pm) - If It’s Weird, It Must Be A Mushroom/ Introduction to Fungi. Introduction to fungi generally, to the major phyla, to the behavioral, ecological roles of fungi in our environment, economic value, and description of the general groups of macro-fungi (mushrooms) and characteristics. We’ll take a walk in the Cold Creek Preserve to understand the role of habitat, substrate, why, when and where they fruit, and how to spot hidden mushrooms. We will collect specimens correctly and return to the classroom and set up spore prints for the next day’s study. Introduction to a few important genera (best edibles, most poisonous) to enable students to recognize them in the future.

Day two (9am to 3pm) - Introduction to the important groups and genera of mushrooms. Presentation of the key characters needed for identification of mushroom genera and species. Learning to recognize several locally common important genera - critical characteristics. Participants will learn how to look at, describe, and then practice keying out to a correct identification, the mushrooms collected the previous day.

*To register: Please send checks to:
Mountains Restoration Trust,
3815 Old Topanga Canyon Road
Calabasas, CA 91302

Florence Nishida, M.S., mycologist, Research Associate Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, also Resident Mycologist, Los Angeles Mycological Society, botanist and certified Master Gardener (Master Gardeners of L.A. County). Nishida has taught and led walks in the local mountains for over 20 years, for various organizations (LAMNH, CNPS, MRT, LAMS, Sierra Club, El Dorado Audubon Society, Placerita Canyon Nature Center, etc.). Her systematic interest is in the genus Inocybe, an LBM “Little Brown Mushroom” usually scorned, thus studied by very few, and she’s proud of her “Key to the Inocybes of California” publication. She’s said to be working on a book on mushrooms of Los Angeles.
Directions: the Sepulveda Garden Center, 16633 Magnolia Blvd. in Encino, is on the north side of Magnolia between Balboa & Hayvenhurst. Park in the lighted lot at the east end of the garden, walk west along the path to the garden center building. Native plant and gardening books will be for sale and refreshments are served. A no-host dinner precedes the meeting at 6:00pm at Tony Roma's Restaurant, 16575 Ventura Blvd., Encino. (818-461-9400)

TUES 2/9 7:30-9:00PM
First United Methodist Church, Santa Monica
A Floral Walkabout in Australia - Botanic Gardens to the Outback
Presenter: Steve Hartman

TUES 1/5 7pm
LA/ SMM Chapter Board Meeting
at Jo Kitz's home at 6223 Lubao Ave in Woodland Hills. Chapter members are invited. 818-348-5910.

TUES 2/2 7pm
LA/ SMM Chapter Board Meeting
at Snowy Dodsor's home in Van Nuys. Chapter members are invited. 15811 Leadwell Street. 818-782-9346
Hikes and Restoration (Cont.)

SAT 2/20 8:30am
Caballero Canyon
Chaparral Chatter hike explores the coming together of winter and spring as early wildflowers burst into bloom with a few shy appearances of four-o'clock, fiesta flower, ceanothus, chaparral current, along with maidenhair ferns and the first showing of miners' lettuce in the oak woodland; the first greens of different popcorn flowers and phacelia. Spring has arrived (assuming we will have had winter rains!) Bring water, hat, snack; boots recommended. RSVP 818-345-6749. 3hrs

SAT 2/20 8:45am
Malibu Creek State Park
Lost Oak Woodland Restoration In 1992, a volunteer oak planting program was started to restore wildlife habitat and to add to the beauty of the park. Commemorative Oaks Program is still going strong. Volunteers have added over 3,000 oak and native trees to the park. Volunteers are needed to plant and care for even more trees and to attend the volunteer supervisor's training program offered by TreePeople. Bring water, snack, sturdy shoes; gloves and tools provided; receive community service credit. Reservations required: 818-591-1701 x203 or online at volunteer@treepeople.org. 4hrs *

SUN 2/21 8:45am
Cold Creek Preserve
Cold Creek Restoration Volunteers plant native trees, wildflower, sages, shrubs and grasses on which the many birds and animals depend for food, nesting and safety. Oaks and sycamores will again grow along Dry Creek and Cienega Sin Nombre; meadow grasses will wave in the breeze where non-native plants (weeds) have taken over. Become a habitat restorationist for a day. Bring snack, water, wear sturdy shoes; gloves and tools provided; receive community service credit. Reservations required: 818-591-1701 x203 or online at volunteer@treepeople.org. 4hrs *

SUN 2/28 9am
Solstice Canyon
Canyon Caper
The canyon is still in post-fire recovery, so this walk will view the recovery of native plants, wildflowers (and many weeds); enjoy burbling creek sounds and chattering bird sounds. Bring water and snack. Info: 818-348-5910. 2hrs

Chapter Election Results
Thanks to all of you who voted in our recent election and also to those who agreed to run for office. Our 2010 officers are: Snowdy Dodson, President; Jo Kitz, Halli Mason, Sheila Braden, Co-Vice Presidents; Henrietta Yuan, Secretary; Steve Hartman, Treasurer; Betsey Landis, Chapter Council Delegate.

Announcements

Chapter Wildflower Show 2010
April 3 & 4
Save the Date and Call for Cuttings
Our CNPS Chapter’s annual Wildflower Show is scheduled for April 3 & 4 at the Malibu Bluffs Park. We would love to have you there for the beautiful display, wildflower hikes, book and art sale. We also welcome California native wildflower cuttings from your home gardens. Contact Snowdy Dodson via email: snowdy.dodson@csun.edu or phone: 818-782-9346 for details. The cuttings need to be available for our set up on Friday April 2.

Nopalito Nursery Opens in Ventura
Nopalito Native Plant Nursery, a new business located at 4107 E. Main Street (next to Lassen's) in Ventura right off the 101 freeway, is currently growing over 200 varieties of native plants, and has a stock of over 10,000 plants...yes, ten thousand plants looking for gardens and ready to install! According to owner Antonio Sanchez, Nopalito Nursery is run in a sustainable manner, meaning utilizing mainly used nursery pots, fertilizing weekly with compost tea and alfalfa tea (which takes a long, long time), and using natural methods to control “bad” nursery bugs. Most plants sell for between $7 - $9 per gallon pot. The nursery is open everyday from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., except major holidays. If Ventura is too far, Nopalito can deliver (minimum order/ delivery fee applicable).

International Drought Symposium
March 24-26, Riverside Marriott Hotel
International Drought Symposium, March 24-26, 2010, at the Riverside Marriott Hotel registration is open via http://cnas.ucr.edu/drought-symposium/
The Symposium will highlight presentations by water experts from Australia, Mexico, South Africa, Spain and the U.S. (California) and is aimed at assembling a body of information about best practices in the field of drought. Because drought is of great interest to the southern California layperson, a free public event “A World with Less Water: Discussion on Drought Policy” will be held on Friday, March 27 in the Marriott. This event will feature a panel discussion by water policy makers who will discuss drought issues and answer questions about methods to avoid and ameliorate drought. No registration or fee is required for this free public program.
POPPY RESERVE STUNNED: RACETRACK WANTS TO BE NEW NEIGHBOR AT FAIRMONT BUTTE
by Margaret Rhyne

A draft Environmental Impact Report has been submitted to the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, proposing to build a racetrack at Fairmont Butte, and subdividing and rezoning some parcels to Commercial. This racetrack would host high performance race vehicles year-round. The area is home to California State Park’s 1,600-acre Antelope Valley Poppy Reserve, and several preserved properties that are owned by conservancies. The area contains a Los Angeles County Significant Ecological Area; in fact, a portion of the project site is in the SEA. At the Commission hearing on September 2, the staff report recommended approval of this project, but two Commissioners seemed unsure, so another hearing will be held in February.

What are the concerns?
Concerns about the project include the change to commercial zoning; noise (Willow Springs Raceway is heard by neighbors five miles away); dust and air pollution; impacts on prehistoric and cultural sites; attraction of illegal off-highway vehicles to remote habitat; impacts on wildlife corridor; and impacts on wildlife from light pollution. The Antelope Valley Astronomy Club meets at the Poppy Reserve for its dark skies, and that would be ended.

How you can help:
Attend the hearing Saturday, February 6, in Lancaster. Los Angeles County Library, 601 West Lancaster Boulevard, 11:00am to 5:00pm. The majority of speakers at the September hearing were in favor of the racetrack. You are needed at this meeting.

Write a letter. Form letters and suggestions are on the website (see below), Tell Supervisor Antonovich and the Planning Commissioners that State Parks and racetracks don’t make good neighbors. Write to:

Mr. Jodie Sackett, Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, Room 1382, 320 West Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012 (sackett@planning.lacounty.gov) and/or

Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, 500 West Temple Street, Room 869, Los Angeles, CA 90012 (fifthdistrict@lacbos.org)


CITY OF LOS ANGELES BUYS EL SERENO PROPERTY FOR NEW HILLTOP NATURAL AREA PARK.
According to an article in the Los Angeles Times (Nov. 10, 2009) written by Louis Sahagun, the Los Angeles City Council voted to settle a lawsuit over a contested luxury subdivision planned for a property known as both “The Heavens” and “Elephant Hill” in El Sereno (northeast of downtown). This area is the largest open space left in this working-class Latino community, and the City agreed to buy the property for $9 million with a goal of transforming it into a nature preserve in a community with one of the lowest parkland-to-people ratios in the city.

According to the article, the city may seek state funding to help defray the costs of improvements including hiking trails, interpretive signs, picnic grounds, a panoramic lookout and habitat restoration. Many community leaders hope to see the hill eventually operated under the auspices of an environmental agency such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Even though the area is far from pristine – the area has been abused by off-road vehicle use and brush clearance efforts have resulted in an invasion of flammable non-native grasses and weeds – it still is home to such varied wildlife as alligator lizards, king snakes, and the rarely seen black-bellied salamanders.
WHAT TO EXPECT... AND DO AFTER THE FIRES
By Cassy Aoyagi

The 10th largest fire in modern California history burned approximately 160,557 acres—more than twice the size of Disneyland—in less than 3 months. The fires leave residents of La Cañada Flintridge, Glendale, Acton, La Crescenta, Pasadena, Littlerock and Altadena, Sunland and Tujunga with little peace of mind. While Angelinos can be thankful the heavy rainfall of October 13th contained the fire, the rainfall also serves as a reminder about the dangers of erosion on desiccated slopes. While our ecosystems appear destroyed after expansive fires, great value exists on a burnt slope. Taking smart action to restore slopes now can prevent erosion, as well as future fires.

EXPECT IMMEDIATE SPROUTS AND UNFAMILIAR FLOWERS
Despite plants having burned to the ground, their root systems are likely still intact and potentially substantial. These root systems can hold the structure of a slope together. Some of the most common and valuable plants with a network of slope-protecting roots are chamise, coyote bush, mountain mahogany, and laurel sumac. The stumps of these plants, among others, will immediately and aggressively sprout following the first rains. These sprouts will begin to provide coverage over the bare earth, creating habitat for insects, birds, and rabbits. Unfamiliar wildflowers will also arise naturally after a fire. Some of the beneficial native wildflower seeds that sprout do so due to scarification, which promotes germination of dormant plant seeds beneath the surface of the soil. Scarification is any kind of "roughening up" of a seed that breaks the "seed coat" or hard barrier that prevented it from germinating without fire. Unfamiliar wildflowers will also appear because the environment has changed dramatically. Whether they needed more sun or more rainfall, they may now have conditions more favorable to their growth. The post-fire season is an opportunity to delight in new wonders! It is also an opportunity to prevent future fires with effective spacing.

PREVENT FUTURE FIRES WITH EFFECTIVE SPACING
As stumps of natives sprout and grow, it is important to begin to increase the spacing between these shrubs and trees. Effective spacing will prevent bushes and shrubs from growing together. As connected foliage enables fires to spread quickly, spacing is an effective fire prevention strategy. Properly placed plants will not need to be cut to the ground each year as part of mandatory fire clearance, as plants that form canopies do. Effectively spacing natives now can save between $2 and $4 per square foot in fire clearance expense! For a community that spent $93.8 million combating the fires, every penny counts.

EVADE SLOPE EROSION WITH NATIVE WILDFLOWERS
Pause before hydroseeding or over-planting non-native wildflowers onto your bare, burnt soil! Nature is actually quite effective at rejuvenating itself. Interrupting nature's course by over-seeding bare areas with non-native annuals can prevent permanent plants from taking hold of the soil. In the summer, dry slopes of these annuals remain and provide tinder for fire. In the winter when these same non-native annuals are dormant, they fail to provide the soil stabilization that prevents erosion. In sharp contrast, the native wildflowers that come up after a fire will fade quickly as the area evolves and develops, making room for permanent, more fire resistant native plants. These permanent natives are much more effective slope stabilizers. Here again, planting natives will save money budgeted for annual fire clearance, as these wildflowers will not become persistent weeds and tinder, as annual non-natives do.

FIRE-PREVENTION AND SLOPE-STABILIZATION CHECKLIST:
1. Be quick now to evaluate the plant life on your slope, identifying what might be favorable and bolstering its survival.
2. Continue to be vigilant so that weeds and non-natives do not out-compete natives. It is the natives that ultimately will stabilize and protect your slope.
3. As the landscape rejuvenates, keep distances between large shrubs and plants 15 to 20 feet apart.
4. Check drains, gutters and all water flow on the property, ensuring all is functioning properly. Do not erode a sensitive slope by allowing irrigation leaks or extra watering.
5. Consider some minor damming with post and boards as needed on the slope, not to stop the erosion, but to slow it down. The speed of water and mud movement is what can be very dangerous. Simply slowing its flow can save a home.
6. Consider sand bags now instead of later.
7. Sow native seeds to support stabilization on our slopes!
8. Educate your neighbors to protect them and yourself from erosion and fire hazards.
9. Allow nature to take its course. Immediately planting non-native annuals will only lead to an encore of this year's fireworks.

About the author
Cassy Aoyagi, President of FormLA Landscaping, infuses her work with her passion for sustainability and her commitment to developing distinct, beautiful landscapes that fulfill her clients' needs and reflect their personalities. Cassy is a recognized expert in sustainable landscaping and frequently shares her expertise through lectures, workshops, seminars, and FormLA-sponsored hikes and learn. Cassy sits on the Los Angeles County Green Building Landscape Subcommittee, and she has presented on sustainable landscaping at events sponsored by Global Green, the Landscape Industry Show, the Alternative Building Materials Expo and Descanso Gardens. Through the Theodore Payne Foundation and numerous Los Angeles garden clubs, Cassy also teaches sustainable landscape design classes to homeowners throughout Southern California. Cassy and her husband Kirk founded FormLA Landscaping as C & K Landscape Design in 1997. By 2000, their interest in ensuring everything their clients experienced was "just right" led them to building a full-service landscaping company. Cassy and Kirk's work has been featured in a multitude of Los Angeles garden tours. Cassy is a LEED accredited professional, licensed contractor, a sustainable landscaper registered with the City of Santa Monica, and a board member of the Theodore Payne Foundation. She and her husband Kirk earned bachelors degrees in environmental horticulture at California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo.
NEW LICHEN SPECIES DISCOVERED AT BERNAUD FIELD STATION
L. munzii named for Philip A. Munz of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden and Pomona College

Kerry Knudsen, Curator of Lichens at the University of California Riverside Herbarium, has discovered a new species of lichen at the Claremont Colleges' Robert J. Bernard Biological Field Station. The new lichen, L. munzii, grows on dead wood of the Chaparral and Coastal Sage Scrub plants, especially California Sage Brush (A. tamaia california). This inconspicuous brown lichen produces an unusual chemical - gyrophoric acid - that is being investigated for its potential to fight bacterial infections, promote wound healing, and treat Type II diabetes. Like all lichens, L. munzii is a fungus that harbors within its tissues a photosynthetic partner - either an alga or a cyanobacterium - that produces food for the fungus. The fungus in turn provides moisture and shelter, and light regulation for the algal partner. Lichens grow slowly and occupy sites that are too harsh or barren for other organisms.

Because L. munzii grows on dead wood, it occurs only in old-growth Chaparral or Coastal Sage Scrub that has not burned frequently, but increased fire frequency throughout southern California has made this type of habitat rare. L. munzii is, however, abundant in old-growth Sage Scrub at the Bernard Field Station, which has been designated as the "type locality" - the geographical location where the species was originally discovered. It has so far been found in only five other sites - all in southern California. "We're very grateful to Kerry for his excellent work in describing this species, and thrilled that the species is named in honor of Dr Munz", says Pomona Professor of Biology, Jonathan Wright. "The Bernard Field Station harbors a rich but inconspicuous flora of epiphytic and ground-dwelling lichens, mosses and liverworts, typical of old-growth coastal sage scrub. It is exciting to have a new species discovered right in our own backyard," Tim Cox, Chair of the Friends of the Bernard Biological Field Station adds, "What you can find even in small portions of natural habitat is truly amazing. I'm sure the BFS has many more surprises in store for all of us."

The Robert J. Bernard Biological Field Station (http://wwwbfs.claremont.edu) is an academic resource of the Claremont Colleges, serving as an outdoor laboratory for many courses and research projects in biology, ecology, zoology, and other disciplines.

For further information, please phone Kerry Knudsen at 951-827-3601 (herbarium) or 951-442-8135 (cell) or e-mail at Knudsen@ucr.edu.

BUSH-ERA PLAN AUTHORIZING OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ON FEDERAL LANDS IN MOJAVE DESERT FOUND ILLEGAL BY COURT

Recently a federal judge rejected a Bureau of Land Management plan for managing millions of acres of public land in the California desert. In response to a challenge brought by a coalition of conservation groups including the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, and Desert Survivors, the court ruled that the Bush-era West Mojave Plan violated the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act by favoring off-road vehicle use over protection of sensitive desert resources such as endangered species and archeological sites.

"This is a huge win for the California desert," said Lisa Belenky, a senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The court's decision takes the Bureau of Land Management to task for designating thousands of off-road vehicle routes while ignoring the significant damage these vehicles cause to our public lands and the wildlife that depend on these lands for their survival."

The court rejected the Bureau's use of a route designation "decision tree" that the agency used to designate areas for off-road vehicles a decision tree that failed to take into account such legal requirements as the minimization of routes to limit damage to public lands and disruption of wildlife and habitats. The court found that the Bureau failed to provide adequate explanation for many of the route changes and actually added routes beyond the limit expressly set in the agency's own planning documents.

It also found that the Bureau violated the law by failing to analyze alternatives that would reduce the number or miles of off-road vehicle routes so as to reduce impacts to resources; that the agency's analysis of impacts of off-road vehicles on air-quality cultural resources, riparian resources, unusual plant assemblages, and sensitive species such as the Mojave fringe-toed lizard was inadequate; and that the Bureau failed to look at the impacts of cattle grazing on sensitive desert soils.

"BLM ignored essential environmental criteria when it designated off-road routes throughout critical desert wildlife habitat," said Karen Schambach, California field director for Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. "Besides wasting 10 years, BLM tiered numerous other bad decisions to this management plan. We hope they finally understand that sustainability of the desert ecosystem is their top priority, not keeping off-roaders happy."

"The BLM planning was backwards," said Elden Hughes, honorary vice president of the Sierra Club. "They should first analyze the resources, natural, cultural, wildlife, etc., and then plan the route network. They put the route approvals first."

The West Mojave Plan, under development for more than a decade, was finalized in March 2006 (incorporating the 2003 route designation), and the lawsuit was filed in August 2006. While the court's decision concluded that the Bureau of Land Management violated the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, the court found that a review of the plan's impacts on the desert tortoise undertaken by a different federal agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, did comply with the Endangered Species Act.
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Send check to David Hollombe, 6223 San Vicente Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90048 or to CNPS, 2707 K Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816.

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Write or phone David Hollombe (323) 934-0332. Include your e-mail address. Be sure to notify State CNPS Office, 2707 K Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816.