

## **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT THREATENS THE SAN JACINTO WILDLIFE AREA**

The San Jacinto Wildlife Area has had a long history in the northern San Jacinto Valley. In the early 1980's the state began acquiring lands to establish the wildlife area to partially replace wildlife habitat which had been destroyed by the construction of the State Water Project (the system of canals and waterways which brings water from northern California water to southern California). Currently, the wildlife area is composed of 19,000 acres of Coastal Sage Scrub, grasslands, riparian and wetland habitat. It includes 2,000 acres of the seasonal wetland known as Mystic Lake, the lake that mysteriously appears along Gilman Spring Road when there are heavy rains. In 2004 the state acquired 9,000 acres of Potrero Canyon and has added it to the San Jacinto Wildlife Area calling it the Potrero Creek Conservation Unit. Over \$80 million of taxpayers money has been invested in the wildlife area by the state of California.

Now the wildlife values of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area are under threat from a mega-development planned on the southern boundary of the area. Lewis Homes of Upland, CA is planning a 'community' on the southern border of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area called The Villages of Lakeview. The 12,000 unit project would put 3,000 housing units on 350 acres of agricultural lands between the San Jacinto Wildlife Area and the Ramona Expressway with the remainder of the project south of the Ramona Expressway. The proposed project/community would be divided by the Ramona Expressway (which will be expanded to an eight lane freeway sometime in the future).

Placing 3,000 homes within 150 feet of a premier wildlife area will have devastating consequences to wildlife and the viability of the wildlife area. Part of the project lands lie within the 100 year flood plain. The developer plans to fill the flood plains which

will alter the course of flood water which in turn will alter habitat for endangered plants and Stephens' Kangaroo Rat. Wildlife area property adjacent to the project site was flooded this winter due to heavy fall and winter rains. If homes are built next the wildlife area, the threat of encephalitis and West Nile Virus could cause these wetlands to be drained and thereby eliminating wildlife habitat.

Other impacts and problems include inappropriate and conflicting land uses, water quality issues, geological, geotechnical, liquefaction problems, noise pollution, light pollution, illegal and inappropriate access to the SJWA by off-highway vehicles, invasive non-native plant species, feral dogs and cats, loss of prime agricultural lands, and loss of other recreational uses at the SJWA. For many years the hunting community of southern California has been a strong supporter of the SJWA (hunting is allowed at all state wildlife areas). Their activities would be severely reduced or eliminated on the southern boundary if homes are located there.

Also, the project will have devastating impacts on the rural communities of Lakeview and Nuevo. The majority of homes in these two communities have large lots, a rural life-style and residents who keep horses and other domestic animals. Their quality of life will be destroyed and the newly developed "community" will be divided by a freeway.

Over the past five years Riverside County has developed a Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan to set aside lands to protect wildlife but also allow unlimited development in the county. The San Jacinto Wildlife Area is one of the cornerstone preserves in the county's MSHCP system, the system which is supposed to protect wildlife life habitat into perpetuity. If the

county is insensitive to the impacts and problems of locating 11,000 houses on the border of this premier wildlife area (one of the few in Southern California), it will sound the death knell for all existing and future reserves.

There has always been strong support for protecting the San Jacinto Wildlife Area from a wide range of individuals and groups: the environmental community, sporting community, and all of those who love its natural beauty.

The County of Riverside issued the notice of preparation for the environmental impact report on July 20, 2006. They are seeking comments for all those who are interested in how this development will affect the wildlife area.

Please join us as we work to protect this “national treasure” and ask the local decision-makers to make good land use choices and protect the San Jacinto Wildlife Area.

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