

Ballona Wetland Conservation supporters slam restoration project

Courtesy photo.

By
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Seeing a future where wildlife habitat is harmed, Ballona Wetlands supporters call recent Environmental Impact Report a “lump of coal on Christmas Eve”

On Dec. 20, environmental and community leaders who have long been involved with protection efforts for this 600+ acre coastal oasis in Los Angeles have blasted the release — just days before Christmas — of an environmental review (Final EIR) for plans that would be harmful to wildlife, protection of which is one of the key mandates for the CA Department of Fish & Wildlife, which ironically released this report.

“This proposal is worse than a lump of coal on Christmas Eve and far worse for climate change,” stated Molly Basler, a Climate Reality Leader trained by Al Gore and Chair of the Wetlands Committee for Climate Reality Project’s Los Angeles Chapter. “Anyone supporting this proposed project is supporting the addition of new fossil fuel infrastructure being added to the gas storage field beneath the Ballona Wetlands.”

“This continued turning of our back on the need to close fossil fuel operations like this — especially when it has been shown that this one provides less than 1% of the gas needs for the state — is unacceptable, given the climate crisis we face. Plus, the removal of thousands of trees, acres of grasslands and wetlands — currently storing carbon — is the opposite of what we need to do to curb climate change impacts,” continued Basler.

Marcia Hanscom, a long-time Sierra Club leader who has received the organization’s highest conservation award twice for her work to protect the Ballona Wetlands and Bolsa Chica Wetlands, stated the following: “The worst thing about this project that has been masquerading as a ‘restoration’ is that we’ve learned the biggest beneficiary of this overwrought effort to design something ‘new’ for the fragile Ballona Wetlands is SoCalGas and its Playa del Rey gas storage facility; they would be rewarded with decades longer use of this dangerous and chemical-laden fossil fuel operation.”

Hanscom is Chair of the Club’s Ballona Wetlands Restoration Committee and serves on the Angeles Chapter Executive Committee. “This storage facility needs to be shut down — as it was characterized in a report* released last year

by the California Council for Science & Technology as being one of the most dangerous gas storage fields in the state,” continued Hanscom, noting that Los Angeles City Councilmember Mike Bonin has called for the shutdown of the operation.

Ethan Senser, Los Angeles Organizer for Food & Water Action!, which has been working in the community with Protect Playa Now, backed up Basler’s concerns, exclaiming, “Any EIR that does not assess the climate impacts of further entrenching a natural gas facility within the wetlands and surrounding community is simply missing the point. We know that if California is going to be a leader on climate, prolonging the use of dirty fossil fuel infrastructure is simply not an option. It is time that

Governor Newsom takes a stand, recall this EIR and direct CDFW to work with the CPUC to determine how we can achieve a quick, just and fair decommissioning of the gas storage operations at the Ballona Wetlands, as we move California towards a clean renewable energy future.”

Besides the gas storage facility looming large in this project, the massive bulldozing project (excavation of more than 2 million cubic yards of soil and grading the entire ecological reserve) would – if carried out – “destroy the homes and food sources for thousands of native animals – some of which are no longer in existence anywhere else on the Los Angeles coast,” according to conservation biologist and hydrologist Robert Roy van de Hoek, a long-time advocate for protection of biodiversity and wildlife in urban Los Angeles and throughout California.

Besides van de Hoek’s former tenure as a US Interior Dept. wildlife biologist, he is currently is President of Ballona Institute. He noted that the plans include a complete overhaul and destruction of habitat where endangered species and other sensitive plants and animals are relying on the habitat now.

He also noted that restoration ecologists like Dr. Margot Griswold, have studied the plans and stated unequivocally that this project in no way can be considered to be a "restoration." He added this: "I was in Governor Gray Davis' office representing the Sierra Club in 2003 when the Governor was considering spending a record \$140 million for this land because it is valuable as habitat for some of the state's most sensitive and imperiled species. And now someone thinks it's ok to throw that all away, start over and try to create a landscape architect's view of nature? That's not restoration! That's playing 'Dr. Frankenstein!'

Huey Johnson, Secretary of Resources for California (appointed by Jerry Brown) from 1978 to 1982, of Defense of Place (and founder of The Trust for Public Land, which helped broker the Ballona land deal), also questioned the plans that were released.

"Why is the California Department of Fish & Wildlife overseeing a plan that would be harmful to wildlife?" asked Johnson. "It has been utterly heartbreaking to me and to many strong stewardship advocates of our natural lands to watch this agency and others that are charged with protecting our natural resources to be increasingly influenced by outside corporate and other private interests who want to make money off of landscapes and wildlife that are treasures to protect," he continued.

Gina Di Teodoro Bryant, a representative of Earthrace Conservation, chimed in. "We will not let our wildlife – the animals that rely on this land – be left homeless or captured in crates so that bulldozers can come in and ruin their wild and precious habitat! This wholesale destruction of ecologically fragile habitats cannot continue under the false flag of 'restoration.' It's especially not acceptable because funding for the public purchase of these lands came from voter-approved 'Wildlife Conservation bonds!'"

<https://www.culvercitynews.org/ballona-wetland-conservation-supporters-slam-restoration-project/>