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"Destruction Is Not Restoration":

Coalition Urges CDFW to Pause $400 Million Bulldozing Plan for Ballona Wetlands

October 30, 2026, LOS ANGELES, CA— Defend Ballona Wetlands, Sierra Club, In Defense of Animals, and allied organizations today called on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to pause its plan, released earlier this week, to bulldoze and excavate the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve and to consider a gentler alternative that protects the wildlife already living there.

The plan, in the coalition's description, would mean nine or more years of heavy-machinery operation and the movement of about 2 million cubic yards of soil, at a cost of up to $400 million in public funds. The Reserve — about one square mile, bought by the State in 2003 for $139 million to protect it — is home to about 1,700 species, including rare, threatened, and endangered wildlife.

"Destruction is not restoration," said Marcia Hanscom, founder of the community coalition, Defend Ballona Wetlands. "We want this land protected, not bulldozed."

An art conservator does not destroy a painting to restore it. A classic-car restorer does not crush the original car and build a look-alike. And when Notre-Dame de Paris burned in 2019, France rebuilt the spire as it was and saved the windows and organ.

Restoration, the coalition says, means careful work to retain and protect the original — not to erase it.

More than three years ago, on May 17, 2023, a Los Angeles Superior Court found the 2020 Final Environmental Impact Report for the project inadequate. CDFW has now released a Draft Revised EIR, limited by its own account to two issues: the 68,000 cubic feet per second flood-control design parameter, and CDFW's commitment to further review if site conditions warrant reducing restoration goals or revising performance criteria. The coalition notes that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has said since 2017 it will not permit a project designed for less than 68,000 cfs, while CDFW designed the project to only 46,000 cfs — the error the Court found alarming.

Defend Ballona Wetlands has proposed a 20-point Gentle Restoration plan that, in the coalition's view, would meet the legitimate goals of restoration without heavy machinery and at a fraction of the cost.

Sierra Club's Chair of its Ballona Coastal Group, Susanne Cumming underscored this point, explaining that, "we must start with a full and updated baseline survey of flora and fauna and protection for rare, threatened, and endangered species. How can we know where to take any sort of action on the land without knowing what habitat and what species we would be losing?"

The coalition is also, in its words, "extremely disappointed that CDFW is moving forward before completing the Land Management Plan for the Reserve," which still has not been completed more than two decades after the Reserve was designated in 2005.

"Deciding on such a radical and significant alteration of the soils and habitat without completing the Land Management Plan, which is supposed to be a guiding document for the Ecological Reserve, puts the cart before the horse and places the rich biodiversity of the land at extreme risk," explained Robert van de Hoek an environmental scientist with Ballona Wetlands Institute and former federal wildlife biologist.

The earlier joint review — the Draft EIS/EIR published in September 2017 by CDFW and the Army Corps — described abandoning or relocating SoCalGas wells and pipelines, and included seven potential well-relocation sites on SoCalGas land adjacent

to the Reserve. The coalition says those relocated wells would still inject fossil gas piped in from OK and TX and also draw on the same Playa del Rey Oil Field beneath the Reserve and beneath Playa del Rey: moving a wellhead does not move the field.

The coalition asks CDFW to pause the bulldozing plan, complete the Land Management Plan, evaluate the Gentle Restoration plan on its merits, and give the public a full and fair opportunity to comment.

CDFW is convening an in-person public meeting on the Draft Revised EIR on Thursday, November 12, 2026, 6:00–7:00 p.m., Westchester Municipal Building, 7166 W. Manchester Ave., Los Angeles. Written comments are due by 5:00 p.m. Monday, December 7, 2026, to BWERcomments@wildlife.ca.gov although groups in the coalition have sent letters to elected officials, seeking an extension of the public comment time period.

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About Defend Ballona Wetlands is a community coalition which is dedicated to the protection of the historical lands and wildlife of the greater Ballona Wetlands ecosystem on the Los Angeles coast.

About the Sierra Club: Sierra Club is one of the oldest grass-roots organizations working to protect the Earth and its wild inhabitants, and its Ballona Coastal Group works within its geographical boundaries to protect nature and provide public access opportunities for the enjoyment of nature to all.

Full background, sources, and the gas / federal-review detail are in the accompanying backgrounder.