

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

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I would like to talk today about the other half of California's land; that is the half not controlled by federal agencies--the local half. On private land local zoning and planning controls under the purview of local boards or councils is the reigning authority.

What are some of the problems facing fish and wildlife in the urban environment? I would like to list a few. We've got all of these in Santa Cruz, you may have more in your area:

1. Sedimentation of streams due to grading, logging, subdivision activities.
2. Nutrient and pollutant buildup in waters as a result of the above mentioned activities and non-point discharges.
3. Channel modifications. Corps of Engineers projects in urban areas typically provide shallow water with no cover resulting in temperature increases in long stretches of channelized river sections.
4. Reservoir construction meaning loss of upland and riparian habitat.
5. Riparian vegetation losses due to in-filling, agriculture, water flow changes as a result of diversions.
6. Stream diversions resulting in fish blockage, flow reduction.
7. Obstruction of migratory routes--roads, reservoirs, are famous for this blockage. In addition, you have the losses of wildlife on roads; in our County, the road kill approximates the hunter kill.
8. Clean up of litter around houses and human used areas results in the loss of amphibian habitats for such species as salamanders, newts, and toads.

9. Recreation cabins, fences, and roads break up wild areas eliminating solitude some species need.
10. Natural problems such as drought conditions which are accentuated by stream diversions.

History of Losses with Local Emphasis

Santa Cruz County has been the third fastest growing County in California in the last years. Some of our specific losses are as follows:

- A. Yacht Harbor - A progressive loss. In the 1950's a coastal wetland was dredged to create a yacht harbor. Mitigation was achieved by placing a dam across the upper area of the harbor and flooding an area to recreate a wildlife marsh. However, increasing demands for berths in the harbor facilities resulted in the expansion of the harbor into the area that was created for wildlife. Result--The entire coastal lagoon lost to a yacht harbor with no compensation for wildlife values. To make it worse, dunce caps were placed on pilings so seagulls wouldn't light on them.
- B. Coastal housing. Sixty-five percent of California's population lives on the coast and the ensuing development of industrial, commercial, and housing areas have removed hundreds of acres of productive habitat areas.
- C. Upland Cabins. Every nook and cranny in the San Lorenzo Valley has a cabin and almost every owner has a dog. I call them Canis destructus and especially destructive they are in the eyes of a shuddering fawn; not to mention all the extras that wash into our streams with the first winter rains.
- D. Street surface contaminants. Chemical constituents of this runoff are at times worse than sewers.
- E. Ground water pumping. May result in losses of riparian habitat through overdraft.
- F. Reservoir Projects. You replace a steelhead stream with the local catchable trout outlet.

The Role of Local Government

Local government is in the unique position of being the executive and the legislative branch combined. Local ordinances are created by local people. In this process interface of biologists with local governments is essential, but how do you get involved? Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Get to know your County Supervisors and your Planning Commissioners. You would be surprised how much a Supervisor can learn in a canoe trip. You have a captive audience. If you really want to be a radical, help elect a biologist to your Board of Supervisors.
- 2) Find out who is processing development applications in the local planning department, what is their procedure for fish and wildlife evaluation.
- 3) Work with your local Public Works engineers on construction and maintenance projects. We've finally convinced our Road Dept. that the stream isn't the best place for a landslide!
- 4) Participate and encourage your Fish and Game Commission. If one isn't formed, urge your Supervisors to do it. Section 13,100 of the Fish and Game Code provides for expenditures of County fines monies for Fish and Game projects.

- 5) Know your radio dispatchers, wardens and sheriffs, and district attorney who handles environmental cases in your county. Wildlife protection is important. Small streams can be protected through the implementation of Section 1602 of the Fish and Game Code for example. Last winter season a steelhead poacher was apprehended when a building inspector on the 4th floor observed him working the river. There is no dis-service in being a snitch when it results in wildlife protection.
- 6) Know your conservation groups. Locally, a vociferous conservation group was effective in getting our open-space plan implemented and starting a process of review of all County ordinances that affect watercourses.
- 7) Volunteer your time to a local government either on a Commission, Committee or Board.

History of Santa Cruz Concern--Some Specifics

I would say our solution began when the local Fish and Game Advisory Commission became infected with a loud biologist. The Commission had observed declining habitat for fish. For example, the portion of the San Lorenzo River bottom classified as silt had risen from 8 percent in 1965 to 65 percent in 1962. The Fish and Game Commission worked with the local junior college and the Department of Fish and Game to start a census program on the winter salmon and steelhead fishery.

With the urging of the Fish and Game Commission, the Board of Supervisors translated its concern for environment into the Watershed Manager's position. Serving as the administrator of a Zone of the Flood Control District, the Watershed Manager was charged to protect areas of percolation of surface water to ground water (spawning areas) and to protect surface and ground water quality. When the position was filled, County Administrative Office representative was heard to comment, "This position is because of the ecology scene, the County's concern for the environment."

Since the Regional Water Quality Control Board seemed to have a hard time figuring out where Santa Cruz was in implementing any reasonable control over siltation of the streams, the County adopted its own Turbidity and Settleable Solids Ordinance setting limits on allowable increases. A brochure has been prepared to explain to the public what turbidity and sediment does to the aquatic system.

The Watershed Program worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Inter-governmental Personnel Act to hire a soil scientist to complete Santa Cruz County's soil survey and implement its facts into the everyday workings of permit administration.

The Board of Supervisors asked to add the San Lorenzo River to the State Protected Waterways Program. Legislation was introduced and passed in Sacramento accomplishing this purpose. A waterway management plan is now being prepared for this river and for, at a later date, the County as a whole. The plan will include water quality monitoring, resource inventory, ordinance review and recommendations.

The Fish and Game Commission worked with the local utility company to install a fish ladder on the utility dam which would allow passage of upstream spawning of salmon and steelhead to approximately four to five miles of pristine watershed.

Losses of Wildlife in our County to wild dog packs precipitated an outcry to the Board of Supervisors for a more effective dog control ordinance. A countywide law requiring dogs be under the immediate control of their owners was implemented; the County trapper was authorized to trap dogs which were chasing big game.

A local veterinarian who has for years been rehabilitating injured birds of prey, approached the Fish and Game Advisory Commission and received \$2,000.00 towards the construction of a birds of prey research and management facility. We hope that endangered species such as peregrine falcons will be bred here from captive stock and hopefully reintroduced into the County and outlying areas.

The County adopted a Timber Harvest Ordinance which is now in the process of revision. Among new concepts are:

- 1) A buffer strip between the cut area and the stream which has a sufficient filter capacity to effectively remove waterborne sediment.
- 2) Cutting specifications which allow the removal of no more than 60% of the trees.

The concept behind the Timber Harvest Ordinance was to plan an operation rather than police a disaster.

Endangered species zoning has been implemented. In the habitat areas of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander, you don't build squared curbs, you build round ones so salamanders can crawl over them. A booklet has been prepared letting homeowners know what the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is and the importance of its continued existence.

Cooperative development projects have restored wildlife habitats. An example is Neary's Lagoon. Together a developer and the City have restored a coastal lagoon which was suffering extensively from eutrophication. Condominiums were allowed on the periphery in exchange for development of loafing islands, dredging, and plantings of desirable wildlife tree species.

In the Environmental Education Advisory Council, concerned conservationists came together to develop curriculum materials for school children in our area.

What the Future Holds for Fish and Wildlife in the Urban Environment

I am very optimistic about the future and its impact on fish and wildlife.

The first and main hope I see is the Coastal Plan implementation, hopefully later, land use plans for broader areas inland will come. The Coastal Plan identifies wildlife and wetland habitat areas and calls for comprehensive watershed management plans. The beauty of the coastal plan is that it requires local general plans conformity with its concepts within a four year period after adoption of the Coastal Plan. Since under State law zoning must conform to general plan, we have an effective mechanism within the whole process to implement wildlife habitat protection zoning.

The implementation of open-space and constraint zones in the general plan process is a promising future for wildlife. Zones such as the Waterfront Zone and the Flood Plain Zone provide the maintenance of riparian habitat communities in these areas. Did we ever think we'd see anything good come from flood control? Yet, the Federal Flood Disaster Act of 1973 prohibits construction within the 100 year flood plain, effectively creating a buffer strip for riparian communities. Hopefully, losses of riparian communities to agricultural areas can also be reduced.

General funding for the Department of Fish and Game is sorely needed. Eighty-five percent of Californians are not hunters or fishermen yet all of the State's wildlife and fish are wards of the Department. An expansion of both the image and the financing of the Department is needed to accomplish the protection of non-game species as well as game species in California.

Greenbelt Park strips are a way of providing wildlife habitat in an urban area. Drainage corridors rather than drainage culverts are another way of providing habitat. An example can be seen with the observance of coyotes on Lighthouse Point in Santa Cruz. How did they get there? Through a two to three mile drainage corridor located behind housing areas.

Land use planning will define the limits of uses of land and the role of specific agencies in the management of our land resources. We definitely need to clarify the highest and best uses of land areas and the integrated management of them for future generations.

Another possibility is the creation of districts similar to Zone 4, the water quality district of the Santa Cruz County Water Conservation and Flood Control District. In Santa Cruz County with an estimated \$600,000,000.00 assessed valuation tax base this year, a one cent tax rate generates \$60,000.00 per year yet costs the average homeowner of a \$40,000 house only \$1.00 in taxes.

But mostly the future depends on you. Your professional involvement in the local process. Much of habitat protection and restoration depends on your knowledge and application of it to the local decision making process. For, in terms of local government, wildlife habitat reality is a majority on your local Board or Council.

