



Los Angeles County  
Department of Regional Planning



*Planning for the Challenges Ahead*

**MINUTES OF THE SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREA** James E. Hartl AICP  
**TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEATAC)** Director of Planning  
**MEETING OF APRIL 3, 2006**

**PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE**

**SEATAC MEMBERS**

Jonathon Baskin, PhD  
Ty Garrison  
Mickey Long  
Ruben Ramirez

**REGIONAL PLANNING STAFF**

Joe Decruyenaere

**Project 02-232 Representatives and Interested Parties**

Ileene Anderson (observing)	(323) 654-5943
Marc Blain	(626) 351-2000
David Levine	(949) 497-0931
Carlene Matchniff	(661) 222-3200
Tom Smith	(626) 351-2000
Melanie Traxler	(626) 351-2000

**MINUTES**  
**April 3, 2006**

**AGENDA ITEMS**

1. The February 6, 2004 SEATAC Minutes were approved March 27, 2006. The March 27, 2006 SEATAC meeting minutes were not available for approval on April 3, 2006.

Ileene Anderson of the Center for Biological Diversity offered the following comments in reference to Project 02-232:

- a. Foothill grasslands are an important regional resource and should be extensively and accurately delineated.
- b. Many plant species recorded in the flora are clay endemics – surveys for vernal pools are needed which, if found, would be regionally significant.
- c. The oak diversity in the immediate area is very high (six species); this area is a ‘natural laboratory’ of oak diversity and hybridization and is important to have conserved.

**NEW BUSINESS**

2. **Project 02-302 – See Attachment Item 2.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**NOTE: SEATAC MEETINGS ARE INFORMAL WORKING SESSIONS. MEMBERS ARE APPOINTED VOLUNTEERS IN AN ADVISORY CAPACITY. MINUTES ARE PREPARED BY PLANNING STAFF PRIMARILY FROM NOTES. SESSIONS ARE ALSO TAPE RECORDED BUT THE TAPES ARE PRIMARILY FOR BACK-UP USE BY STAFF. VISITORS ARE ADVISED TO TAKE PROPER NOTES AND/OR RECORD THE SESSION. ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED BY SEATAC DO NOT IMPLY TACIT APPROVAL. NEW OR CLARIFIED INFORMATION PRESENTED IN SUBSEQUENT SUBMITTALS MAY RAISE NEW ISSUES AND MAY REQUIRE FURTHER ANALYSIS. MINUTES ARE GENERALLY APPROVED AT THE NEXT SEATAC MEETING. DRAFT MINUTES MAY BE REQUESTED BUT ARE SUBJECT TO REVISION.**

## SEATAC REPORT AND COMMENTS

SPECIFIC PLAN 02-232, CUP 02-232, TR 060020, TR 060021, TR 060022, TR 060023

SEATAC MEETING DATE APRIL 3, 2006, ITEM 2

Revised Biota Report Prepared by BonTerra Consulting, dated February, 2006

Previous SEATAC Review: November 3, 2003 of Biota Report prepared by Impact Sciences

**PROPOSED PROJECT: SPECIFIC PLAN 02-232, CUP 02-232, TR 060020, TR 060021, TR 060022, TR 060023** – The proposed project includes a Specific Plan, tract maps and conditional use permits for a master planned community divided into a series of planning areas. The Specific Plan proposes a maximum of 23,000 dwelling units and 14 million square feet of non-residential development for employment (12,233,390 sq. ft.) and retail serving centers (1,986,336 sq. ft.) anticipated to be built over a period of approximately 20 years. Project entitlements also include an SEA CUP to allow development in portions of SEA Nos. 58 and 59, to operate water supply and wastewater treatment facilities, to develop within hillside management areas, an Oak Tree Permit for removal and encroachment on oak trees, a Development Agreement with the County of Los Angeles, and a separate CUP to modify the existing High Desert Hunt Club (CUP 96-155) for a reduction in property area to be contained in Centennial Specific Plan. One Vesting Tentative Parcel Map (VTPM) and three Vesting Tentative Tract Maps (VTTM) are requested as part of the project application. VTPM 60022 covers the entire Specific Plan area and contains 124 parcels encompassing approximately 5,122 acres in area, with the average parcel size being 50 acres. VTTM 60020 and VTTM 60023 are located west of the California Aqueduct and VTTM 60021 is located east of the aqueduct and south of SR-138. VTTM 60023 encompasses 2,534 acres and includes approximately 2,946 residential units, 38.4 acres of business park uses and 13.6 acres of commercial uses. VTTM 60020 encompasses 1,092 acres and includes approximately 2,654 residential units, and 8.7 acres of commercial uses. VTTM 60021 includes 197 acres of business park uses. Wastewater service to the site will require the formation of a wastewater district and development of a wastewater facility. The Centennial Specific Plan will be served by a water treatment plant providing water suitable for drinking and other domestic uses, and two water reclamation plants to treat generated effluent, one plant on each side of the California Aqueduct.

**SEA DESCRIPTIONS:** The Portal Ridge/Liebre Mountain area (**SEA 58**) is in close proximity to the Mojave Desert, the San Gabriel Mountains, and the Tehachapi Foothills. This position, at the intersection of three major geographical regions has produced the most diverse and unique flora found in the county. The area contains ten distinct plant communities, representing transitions between desert, foothill, and montane environments. The diversity of the area is further enhanced by the presence of many northern species, some of which are rare in the county, reaching their southern limit here.

Foothill woodland is an uncommon plant community that occurs in this area. It is a community containing both oak parklands of blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) and valley oak (*Q. lobata*), and foothill pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) woodland. This community is more common in northern and central California where it occurs along foothill and valley transitions in the inner Coastal Ranges and western foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The distribution of this community extends south through the Tehachapi Mountains to the San Gabriel Mountains and reaches its

southern limit on Portal Ridge/Liebre Mountain. This is the only place this community is found in the county. Similarly, several of the component species including blue oak, foothill pine, and California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*) reach their southern limits here, and are found nowhere else in the county.

On the lower slopes and in the valleys south of the main ridgeline, southern oak woodland, valley grassland, riparian woodland, and coastal sage scrub can be found. Higher slopes and ridge tops are covered with chaparral and yellow pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) forest. On the north-facing slopes, which are under desert influences, pinyon-juniper (*Pinus monophylla-Juniperus californica*) woodland habitat is present. Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) woodland and sagebrush scrub cover the lower desert hillsides in the area.

All of these communities are relatively common in the county with the exception of sagebrush scrub. This community, dominated by great basin sage (*Artemisia tridentata*), is not common in California south of the Owens Valley. Populations in southern California may be relics of an earlier time when the community extended much further south than it does today.

Despite the commonness of most of the plant communities present, this area is very valuable because it possesses such a concentrated diversity of vegetation types. This creates an outstanding opportunity for educational use, nature study, and scientific research.

The Portal Ridge/Liebre Mountain area is relatively large, and the precise locations of its most unique resources are not known. For this reason, the priority group assigned to it reflects only the value of the entire area for scientific research. However, further studies should be conducted to determine the exact location of the more unique resources within the area. Portions of the SEA containing sagebrush scrub should be identified and placed in priority group 2. Foothill woodland habitat should also be set apart and given a priority group 3 rating. Additional highly valuable resources should be identified and rated as they are found. Enough of the area should be preserved so that the interface between the communities can be maintained.

The grassy, south-facing slopes of the Tehachapi Foothills (SEA 59) are one of the best foothill wildflower sites in southern California. In addition, the area is located at the junction of the Mojave Desert, the Transverse Ranges, and the Tehachapi Mountains, and possesses floral and faunal components from each region. As a result, the area is extremely diverse and contains many unique ecological relationships of scientific value.

The vegetation of the area consists primarily of herbs and forbs. Characteristic plant species include buttercup (*Ranunculus* spp.), poppy (*Argemone*, *Eschscholzia* and *Platystemon* spp.), owl's clover (*Castilleja exserta*), and many species of sunflowers (family Asteraceae). Spectacular wildflower displays are common here.

Several other plant communities are found in the area. These include chaparral, riparian woodland, foothill woodland, southern oak woodland, and valley grassland. This variety of habitats, and the overlap of mountain and desert influences, make the area very valuable.

---

**SEATAC COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPECIFIC PLAN 02-232, CUP 02-232, TR 060020, TR 060021, TR 060022, TR 060023: (Frank Hovore provided comments on the Biota Report via email)**

- 1) The virtual lack of infrastructure in the area of the proposed project presents an exceptional opportunity to design a project that would be truly sensitive to biological resource values and would set a precedent for future development in the area. However, the proposed design for the project indicates no real sensitivity to biological

resources. The proposed project design would entail significant losses of several sensitive habitat types that cannot be mitigated.

- 2) Oso Creek is inadequately protected, and should be protected in its entirety.
- 3) The regional value of the two large wetland areas on the site is not adequately discussed in the Biota Report.
- 4) Impacts to pronghorn antelope are not discussed in the Biota Report.
- 5) The wildlife movement discussion offers no real proposals for mitigation and misses several important points. Regardless of past impacts in the area to regional connectivity, the entire site currently provides a suite of high quality habitats which are interconnected and which relate to the surrounding area in a variety of ways. Low-elevation linkages have been ignored, although many of the sensitive elements on site are most likely to be found in such habitats. Linkage opportunities through the site have not yet been lost for insects, plants or birds or for other small-bodied species that may simply move through fences and gates. Gene flow among sub-populations of plants and small-bodied animal species, mediated by the accumulated movements of generations of individuals, is a more important phenomenon than individual direct movement from one side of the site to the other. Furthermore, the currently constrained nature of the linkage for large-bodied species does not serve to justify a conclusion that the site has no linkage value. On the contrary, any linkage value provided by the site has been increased in the few pinch points that remain. At the very minimum, the project must be designed to foster the linkage values remaining.
- 6) Mitigation Measure Bio-1 does not mitigate losses to sensitive habitats. The loss of the majority of sensitive habitats and species, are not mitigable by translocation, sowing of seed into unproven substrates, or any other measure except direct avoidance of the impact. Mitigations proposed for flow channels, whereby they would be widened to create larger areas of wetlands, are more similar to creation of debris basins or similar catchments than they are to habitat enhancement. These also do not mitigate for the losses of natural watercourse features or wetlands.
- 7) Biological documentation of Tejon Ranch has been extensive and historical information should be disclosed as a part of the review of Centennial.
- 8) Review of information for future phases in this document must be considered informal and not binding in any way upon SEATAC or the County, because the information given is not sufficiently specific for complete analysis. Moreover, if the future phases are equivalent to a Specific Plan, then it must be understood that a full Specific Plan report should be submitted for review, not simply encapsulated in bits and pieces in the bio report for this project. Comments made herein relative to the future phases should be considered as SEATAC-level review of incomplete information, and should be used by the applicant's consultants to guide their thinking relative to the next level of submittal. Elements not specifically commented-upon should not be regarded as having met with SEATAC approval.
- 9) Page 14, bottom of table: clarify the meaning of "inferred in letter from Dr. Paul Beier."
- 10) Page 17, first paragraph: The analysis of cover confounds vegetated (i.e. 'covered') classes with unvegetated (i.e. 'uncovered') classes. Such confusion in the discussion diminishes the importance of native species and diminishes the overall credibility of the discussion. While the abundance of covered are can be considered as part of a mosaic

- that includes uncovered area, uncovered areas are not factored into the percentage of cover provided by any particular species: e.g., if all of the plants in an area are of a single species and they are widely spaced, cover by that species is 100%.
- 11) Page 69: there is insufficient knowledge of silvery legless lizard to make statements purporting its 'natural' rarity. It is rarely encountered, but not known to be rare except where made so by habitat loss or disturbance. Statements of this sort diminish the real possibility that many individuals of this species may be lost by alluding to a presumed rarity, thereby implying large numbers of individuals would not be affected.
  - 12) Page 72 and 73: the discussion of tricolored blackbird does not mention the large breeding colony of this species northwest of the project at the east end of Castac Lake, over the ridge from the Centennial property and in the same ownership.
  - 13) Page 75: statements about the status of yellow-billed cuckoo fail to note the timing of the sighting and follow-up visits by Impact Sciences staff. The dates of their surveys were mostly June and July; this species is known to arrive, nest, fledge and exit the area during that time. Without follow-up visits by qualified biologists at the appropriate time, this species cannot be dismissed as a potential breeder on the site.  
The property is claimed to be just outside of the known range for white-tailed kite. This is incorrect. The species does not occur in the higher mountains of the Tehachapi and Sierra Nevada, but is abundant as a breeding bird around the lower margins of these areas, and the project site is within its range.
  - 14) Page 79: purple martin has at least one breeding colony site on the Tejon Ranch, and it occurs on the Centennial site.
  - 15) Page 81: the Tehachapi pocket mouse discussion is based upon insufficient information. The trap timing, orientation, placement, substrate selection, etc. all would be crucial to evaluation of presence/absence for this species, and would require expert trapping. These data appear not to have been documented in this case. Moreover, trap results from one or a few small sub-areas on the site cannot be extrapolated to mean that the species does not occur other than where the trapping was conducted. This species is known to occur very near the project site in similar conditions, and should be carefully evaluated by qualified expert trapping studies.
  - 16) Open space: a golf course in this location does not provide natural open-space functions commensurate with habitat values of the site in its current condition, and a golf course cannot count as 'open space' with biological function in the Biota Report. Internal greenways of the project do not connect or serve to foster use of the habitats that would remain with project implementation.
  - 17) The project has not been designed to avoid biological constraints within the SEAs or along drainage courses. All of the sensitive plant populations within SEA 58 would be impacted by the proposed project design, and sites for habitat creation of these species are not available within proposed open space areas.
  - 18) Conduct red-legged frog surveys in Quail Lake.
  - 19) Provide digital copies of all technical reports to SEATAC with the next submission of the Revised Biota Report.
  - 20) Water quality-mediating infrastructure should be designed to a 10-year peak flow standard rather than a 2-year standard.

---

**ACTION TAKEN:** Further SEATAC review of the project is required; incorporate the above comments and recommendations into a revised Biota Report. Project

specific analysis of impacts from implementation of the proposed tract maps must be provided.