

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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December 21, 2020

Vincent P. Bertoni, Director
City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning
201 N. Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Request to Expedite Wildlife Corridor Ordinance

Dear Mr. Bertoni:

The need for the City to adopt a Wildlife Corridor ordinance stemming from the Wildlife Pilot Study becomes sadly more evident every day. It has been over three years since the City Council approved a motion that designated a Wildlife Habitat Linkage Zone and called for a Wildlife Corridor Ordinance in the eastern Santa Monica Mountains between the 405 freeway and Griffith Park.

At any given time since then, there are several dozen permit applications for new single family homes and remodels in the Wildlife Habitat Linkage Zone (Zone). It is entirely possible that a dozen of those proposed homes or remodels could result in avoidable significant adverse impacts to wildlife movement in this Zone. Avoidable is the key word.

Maintaining habitat connectivity does not have to slow or impede development. Small informed adjustments to proposed development make a world of difference to allow wildlife passage through private property. To make those differences in the entitlement process, an Ordinance is vital to require designers and planning staff to ask key questions using existing GIS resources.

For example, a recently constructed house at 2044 Benedict Canyon Drive closed off the last unfenced habitat linkage across that hillside arterial street. That habitat linkage was demarcated on the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's (Conservancy) *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map*. That planning map, last updated in February 2020 has been available to the City Planning Department since January 2018. At a GIS parcel line level, the map showed that a habitat crossing of Benedict Canyon Drive was located on the lot. The viability of that connection was obvious using Google Earth aerial photography. If the Wildlife Corridor Ordinance was in place that significant

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permanent loss of habitat connectivity probably would not have occurred. We undoubtedly will lose the mountain lion, mule deer, bobcat and grey fox populations east of the 405 freeway, including in Griffith Park, if the City does not soon adopt new regulations and development standards.

In public meetings for the Wildlife Pilot Study your staff has shown a thoughtful framework of regulations to form the core of a Wildlife Corridor Ordinance. That framework addresses buffers and setbacks from natural resources for wildlife movement. It also addresses development standards for fencing, landscaping, lighting, windows, and trash enclosures in considerable detail. The Wildlife Pilot Study has been widely advertised for over a year.

No more data gathering is needed. The continually refined Conservancy *Eastern Santa Monica Mountains Habitat Linkage Planning Map* combined with existing City and County GIS databases, and Google Earth photography provide an adequate foundation to analyze potential development impacts on existing wildlife movement pathways (both mapped and not-yet-mapped).

There is no excuse for City planning to approve a development that adversely impacts a mapped wildlife movement path without at least trying to analyze and mitigate the impact in the entitlement process. If your department cannot find the nexus to require mitigation, it can at least inform applicants about the impact and attempt to gain their voluntary cooperation to maintain some level of wildlife movement potential.

As demonstrated above, with the example of 2044 Benedict Canyon Drive, we are out of time. It is imperative that the Ordinance be expedited and adopted in fiscal year 2020-21. To have the full spectrum of native mammal species bringing their spirit to the heart of the City is a gift that must not be squandered by needless delay gathering “data.”

At a minimum we must have an Ordinance that requires a simple pre-development-approval constraints analysis using the free GIS tools described above. If there is not such an official City planning tool to address habitat connectivity impacts, including fencing, the battle will be lost. If just these two elements are addressed in the Ordinance the battle will be won. Development standards for landscaping, lighting, windows, and trash enclosures are of second tier importance. The Conservancy urges your department to keep the Ordinance simple to ensure that it is adopted by June 30, 2021.

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Our staff is available to assist in any way. The Conservancy looks forward to the adoption of a Wildlife Corridor Ordinance in early 2021.

Sincerely,

IRMA R. MUÑOZ
Chairperson