



STAR West County

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Thursday meeting

The Oxnard Planning Commission will discuss the proposed developments on Thursday at 7 p.m. at Oxnard City Hall.

The draft environmental impact report can be found at the city Oxnard Web site: <http://www.oxnard.ca.us>. CD copies can be obtained for free at the Planning Division offices on the second floor of the city building at 305 W. Third St., 385-7858.

Oxnard plans for Ormond Beach doom preserve

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

However, that is exactly what one of the two proposed developments would do. It will take the agricultural buffer zone south of Hueneme Road and turn it into a business park. Long term, that decision impinges on the important and otherwise irreplaceable benefits that this wetland will provide to Ventura County's future. Business parks can be sited elsewhere. The Ormond Beach wetlands cannot.

In the much shorter term, however, the housing development proposed for north of Hueneme Road will bring thousands of families and their children, cats and dogs to within a short distance of Ormond's extremely sensitive nest sites.

Unfortunately, the two proposed projects would tip the precarious balance that now exists at Ormond. The most sensitive species remain in very small numbers. We have only a couple of dozen least tern nests this year, still down significantly from the approximately 80 nests in 2003. Any additional impact is likely to cause the terns to leave the area as they did in the '60s, when surfers and drag racers controlled the dunes, and as happened a couple of years ago, when paragliders' flights reduced the number of successful least tern nests from 80 to zero.

And the Coastal Conservancy's proposed restoration? If the most sensitive wildlife has already abandoned the site, the effort will merely be what Rimmon Fay, Ph.D., referred to as "a landscaping project," not habitat restoration.

The Sierra Club, Earth Alert and other organizations and citizens who wish to preserve Ormond wildlife hope that you will join us at the Oxnard Planning Commission meeting at Oxnard City Hall on Thursday at 7 p.m.

— Janet Bridgers, of Oxnard, is founder/director of Earth Alert, which helps educate the public on environmental issues. Its Web site is <http://www.earthalert.org>.

Thursday, the Oxnard Planning Commission will conduct a hearing on two development proposals that would result in the annexation of more than 700



Janet
Bridgers

acres from the county to the city of Oxnard. Most of this land, lying within the Ormond Beach Specific Plan Area, would then be converted from agricultural fields to more than a thousand homes north of Hueneme Road and a massive

business park south of the road.

Converting agricultural lands to business parks and housing is "business as usual" for the city of Oxnard. However, that approach to the most biologically precious patch of land in the county shows a profound lack of understanding, or callous dismissal, of what makes Ormond Beach unique.

Any coastal wetland is important. Those remaining in Southern California are a tiny fraction of what used to exist. In addition to critical bird habitat, wetlands provide human recreational opportunities, prevent flooding and filter storm runoff. They provide nurseries to a wide variety of fish species and reserves for native plants.

But Ormond is special, even among other wetlands. Visiting the Ormond wetlands throughout the year, one sees dozens of bird species. Many are familiar. Others are extremely rare. With implementation of a regional

coastal wetlands restoration plan, Ormond's size, range of features and surrounding agricultural lands give it great potential to provide habitat for numerous struggling species. Some, such as least terns, snowy plovers and Belding savannah sparrows, are here already; others, such as the elusive light-footed clapper rail, could be reintroduced.

Global warming promises that our winter storms will be more severe. Reduction in wetlands acreage ratchets storm-damage potential up a higher notch. Through our taxes and higher insurance rates, we all pay for storm damage. Development of wetlands that benefits only one or two developers is not in the general economic interest of the community.

Size is important. Ormond has what no other wetland in Southern California has — room to migrate as ocean levels rise. It is not hemmed in by development. We have reached the point that we must plan for rising ocean water levels. A report by the U.N. climate panel released earlier this year predicts a rise of somewhere between 11 and 17 inches by 2100. In addition to exacerbating storm-damage potential, this sea-level rise will cause other Southern California wetlands to swell up over roads, across railroad tracks and parking lots and against building foundations. Seawalls will have to be built. The margins of the wetlands, which are extremely valuable to a wide variety of species and the interaction of the ecosystem, will disappear.