

STAR Oxnard

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Migrating birds need wetlands, new cars don't

Area offers Pacific Flyway respite

The Ormond Beach wetlands have frequently been cited by naturalists as one of the most important wetlands in Southern California. More than 300 bird species have been identified there, including some that are on the endangered species list.

This biological diversity is the result of being located on the Pacific Flyway migration route, the path many bird species travel in their annual migrations along the west coast of North America, but also because there is nowhere else to go.



Janet
Bridgers

Most other Southern California coastal wetlands have been filled in

and developed. Without places where birds can rest and nourish themselves with the fish species that wetlands provide, the survival of many bird species is threatened.

The Oxnard Planning Commission's recent decision to allow the Pacific Vehicle Processors expansion project to be located next to these wetlands is a senseless blow to this unique area.

It is comparable to eating your seed corn. Seed corn looks pretty much like regular dried corn. You could cook it, eat it and have a meal or two.

Or you could plant and harvest it to feed you and your family for an entire winter.

You may remember the words of an old Joni Mitchell song: "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

At the Planning Commission meeting, PVP's paid employees and consultants trumpeted the benefits of PVP's "parking lot."

It contrasted with those of the Saviers Road Design Team, a group of south Oxnard residents who have no economic interest in the project, only a passionate desire to protect a biological treasure.

Strictly speaking, the PVP site is part of the Ormond Beach wetlands. The residents want to use the site for a park that would not only buffer and protect the nearby wetlands, but also welcome nature lovers to Ormond Beach without requiring them to find their way around a maze of developed properties.

Better beach access via such a park would also improve the quality of life and raise property values. Making Ormond Beach a mecca for naturalists would bring badly needed tourist dollars to Oxnard.

It also makes Oxnard more attractive for companies seeking to

relocate. Such companies know quality of life is important in attracting and retaining skilled workers.

Ultimately, these factors will combine to improve the economy of Oxnard to a far greater extent than a parking lot and the relatively few jobs — most of them for minimum wage — that PVP is offering.

The California Coastal Conservancy recently purchased a nearby site and is also in the process of buying additional land close by. A comprehensive plan for developing the area has not been made, and the shortsightedness of the Oxnard Planning Commission to allow development of the area before such a plan is made demonstrates a "land rush" mentality that harkens to another time when vacant land was appreciated merely as a place to be filled.

Community activists testifying before the Planning Commission repeatedly stated that they were not against the PVP project, but rather the location.

The jobs could be saved by simply moving the project to another site, and a great deal of effort at the county level is being devoted to finding an appropriate alternative spot.

Environmentalists speaking at that meeting asked only for a full environmental impact report, which would not only help ensure that the project would not impact sensitive adjacent areas but also would examine possible alternative sites.

More than one commissioner demonstrated disregard for the planning process itself by reading statements that had been prepared before the evening's testimony began.

In other words, their decisions had already been made.

The Planning Commission's decision has now been appealed to the Oxnard City Council.

Unless the City Council reverses that decision, the legality of developing the site will be decided through litigation.

Is this how the residents of Oxnard want their taxes to be spent?

They can give the council the answer to that question when the council meets Tuesday.

— Janet Bridgers is the founder and director of Earth Alert in Oxnard. She can be reached at 487-2999.