



Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation, Inc.

Post Office Box 353, Agoura Hills, California 91301



The voice and conscience of the Santa Monica Mountains for 45 years

February 2012 MEETING

Wednesday, February 29 at 7:00 p.m.

The Place – Diamond X – Take Las Virgenes to Mulholland; turn left on Mulholland. For the next 3/4 mile, the King Gillette Ranch will be on your right. After you've passed Stokes Canyon Road, in about 3/4 mile, you will see a sign on your right with "Diamond X" and the National Park Service logo on it. A short distance past the sign a narrow road goes south at a right angle. This is Wickland Road, and, at this point you are entering the King Gillette Ranch. Follow Wickland about 300 yards until the road forks; take the left-hand fork; keep bearing left to the lighted house on the right. Park; enter through the lit doorway.

Call to Order

Roll Call

Agenda Changes/ Approval

Correspondence/Announcements

Officer's Reports

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Old Business

1. OWTS Enforcement Update Calabasas
2. Banquet
3. LSA Update

New Business

1. Tribute to National Park Service Superintendent Woody Smeck. Guest speaker: Woody Smeck – update of what transpires now in the Santa Monica Mountains as he heads to Yosemite.
2. Calabasas Proposed Wireless Ordinance – Liat Samhoui
3. LVUSD Performing Arts Centers – unmitigated impacts and solutions - Agoura Hills and Calabasas
4. Monte Nido - 30 year old, multi-home project rears its head

***FIELD TRIP to MALIBU LAGOON 3:45 p.m.**

Conducted by Suzanne Goode, accompanied by Marcia Hanscom. Starts at the Malibu Lagoon at 3:45 p.m. **Meet at Diamond X at 3:00 p.m.** for carpooling to the Lagoon. Return to Diamond X after tour for dinner at 6:00 p.m., followed by our meeting at 7:00 p.m.

30-YEAR-OLD TRACT IN MONTE NIDO SHOWING SIGNS OF LIFE

The controversial 22 lot Quaker-Ross subdivision along Piuma Road in Monte Nido has remained undeveloped and out of the limelight since it was first approved by the Coastal Commission in 1983, but recently there have been conversations between a new owner, developer Matt Osgood, president of Vintage Communities of Irvine, Supervisor Yaroslavsky's office, and the Monte Nido Valley Community Association about the possibility of building out the old tract.

The mile-long, 150-acre former Quaker-Ross property stretches along both sides of Piuma Road from the Saddle Peak Lodge to the colorful, rugged cliffs of Saddle Peak above Monte Nido. State Parks originally wanted to purchase all of Quaker-Ross for the Backbone Trail Corridor, but Ross refused to sell more than 40 acres and, instead, used his political clout in Sacramento to pressure the State, the Coastal Commission, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy into approving development of the property.



In the end a settlement was reached in which Ross sold about forty acres to State Parks and agreed to donate 70 more acres if the Coastal Commission would approve development on at least 22 building sites on the rest of the property. Over the strenuous objections of the Monte Nido Valley Community

Piuma Road with Dark Canyon off to the right and Saddle Peak in the distance.

Association, the Coastal Commission approved the 22-lot tract in July, 1983, but only after requiring some strict mitigation- including the 70-acre donation.

A majority of the approved lots were rough-graded in the late 1980's, but development came to a halt shortly after that, and no houses were built for the next twenty-five years.

State Parks, for obscure bureaucratic reasons, never picked up Ross's offer to dedicate the 70 acres, which included much of Dark Canyon and some of the most scenic peaks and cliff faces on Saddle Peak above Monte Nido. It looked like the 21-year offer to

dedicate the 70 acres might expire before the state got around to taking title to the land.

At last, over twenty years after the original Coastal Commission approval, with the offer to dedicate about to expire, the Santa Mountains Conservancy stepped in and picked up the 70 acre dedication.

Meanwhile, the rest of the 22 Quaker- Ross lots had gone into foreclosure and reverted back to the bank. The bank put up a big “for sale” sign and tried to sell off the lots individually, but with very limited success. One lot was sold and developed with an oversized house, but the rest of the 1983 lots have remained undeveloped and the building pads graded over twenty-five years ago are slowly eroding and reverting back to nature.

In order to see the Quaker-Ross property, turn off Las Virgenes Road just before the Malibu Creek bridge and head east on Piuma Road with Malibu Creek on your right. After about half a mile, you will cross Cold Creek, then pass through a wooded area and climb a gentle slope past the Fire Station and the Saddle Peak Lodge. At this point the aging graded pads of the original Quaker-Ross development will begin to appear among the oaks on both sides of the road, while the magnificent pink and orange sandstone faces of 2800-foot Saddle Peak can be seen rising above Dark Canyon a mile to the east, forming one of the most spectacular scenic vistas to be seen anywhere in southern California.

Between the Saddle Peak Lodge and the base of Saddle Peak itself, Piuma Road passes under the arching branches of the live oaks that shade the road. The graded pads that have largely reverted back to nature are intermingled here with the live oaks.

Further on, the graded pads fall away behind you and you will come to a very sharp hairpin turn where Piuma Road begins to switchback up the east flank of Malibu



"Hairpin Turn" on Piuma Road looking southeast toward the low ridge marking the southwest boundary of Dark Canyon. Saddle Peak (2805') is visible in left distance. The Backbone Trail climbs the low ridge, follows it for 600', then switchbacks down into Dark Canyon (off photo to the right). It is during that 600' that the trail leaves State Park land and enters Osgood's Lots 10 & 11.

Canyon. At the hairpin turn the State Backbone Trail will cross Piuma Road and climb up a draw to a low ridge that overlooks Dark Canyon. Most of the year, Dark Creek, a year-round stream, can be heard rushing through the wooded canyon below the ridge, while the sandstone faces of Saddle Peak dominate the view high above the canyon.

There are five approved but ungraded and undeveloped lots close to the hairpin turn on Piuma Road that are among the 22 lots approved by the Coastal Commission at the time of the 1983 Quaker-Ross approval. Development of these already approved lots would involve unsightly grading along the Backbone Trail and into Dark Canyon and would interfere with the function of the Backbone Trail Corridor as the only east-west “wildlife corridor” in the Santa Monica Mountains.

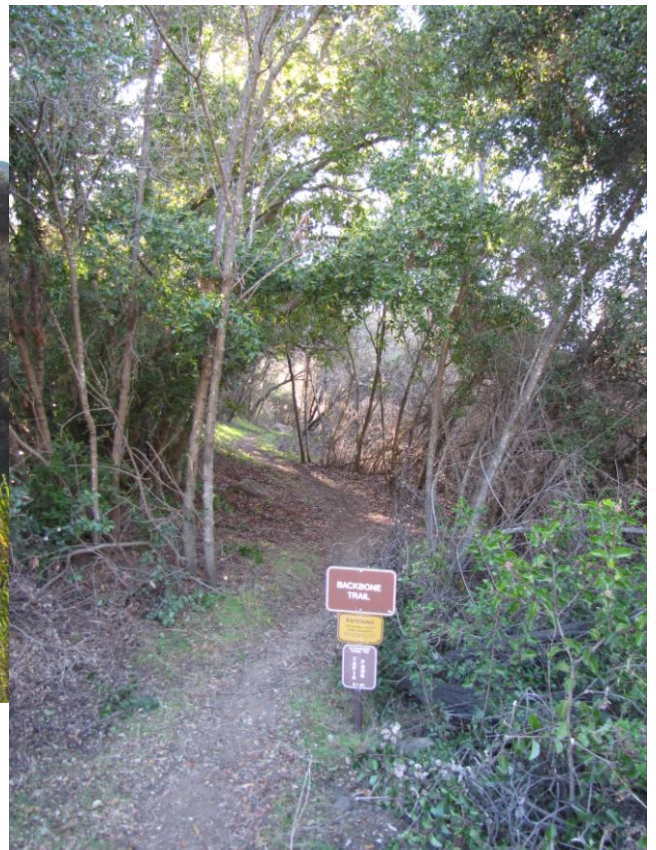
Developer Matt Osgood, president of Vintage Communities in Orange County, is planning to develop the approved but still undeveloped lots remaining from the 1983 Coastal Commission approval.

In meetings with the Monte Nido Valley Community Association (MNVCA) Board of Directors Osgood has assured them that he does not plan to build oversized mansions like the ones in the nearby “Monte Nido Triangle”. Rather, he says he wants to build modest 2500 to 3000 square foot early California-style ranch homes.

Osgood also sent a letter to MNVCA indicating he would dedicate the 5 ungraded lots near the hairpin turn on Piuma to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy in consideration for building out the graded lots. That would of course become a condition of approval. If he follows through on this, it would go a long way toward protecting this vulnerable section of the Backbone Trail, keeping development out of unspoiled, scenic



The spectacular Backbone Trail as it crosses through Monte Nido (either side of Piuma). The originally approved lots flank both sides of the Backbone Trail.



Saddle Peak and Dark Canyon, and allowing the Backbone Trail Corridor to continue to be used as an east-west habitat linkage. This donation would also eliminate the need for a debris basin, which is a key benefit.

However, there are many unanswered questions and problems that prevail here. One involves fire clearance.

At the time of the 1983 Quaker- Ross Coastal Commission approval, the Coastal Commission mapped and approved a building pad site on each lot. The lots were conditioned to require as little as a 50-foot fire clearance setback from these approved pads and the native vegetation. Today the County Fire Department typically requires full clearance or at least major thinning of any native vegetation within 200 feet of any flammable structure.

Denuding the landscape and leaving a massive 200 foot scar around a development project of this magnitude (15 home subdivision) in this sensitive and integral habitat area is not acceptable. An adequate brush clearance plan would have to be worked out in advance with LA County Foresters, etc.

In addition, the State Park ownership for the Backbone Trail Corridor in Monte Nido south of Piuma Road is only 150' to 200' wide in many places, and the only building sites permitted in this area under the conditions of the July, 1983, Coastal Commission approval are sometimes only 50' to 100' from dense native vegetation on the adjoining state--owned Backbone Trail Corridor. Development of homes on these lots could cause the Fire Department to demand major brush clearance on State Park land that is part of the Backbone Trail Corridor, again further narrowing the east-west habitat linkage.

Osgood and Vintage Communities have also built other projects in the area, including a home tract next to Peter Strauss Ranch. His company is also a principal in a Monterey Downs LLC group led by local developer Brian Boudreau. Their proposed project is a

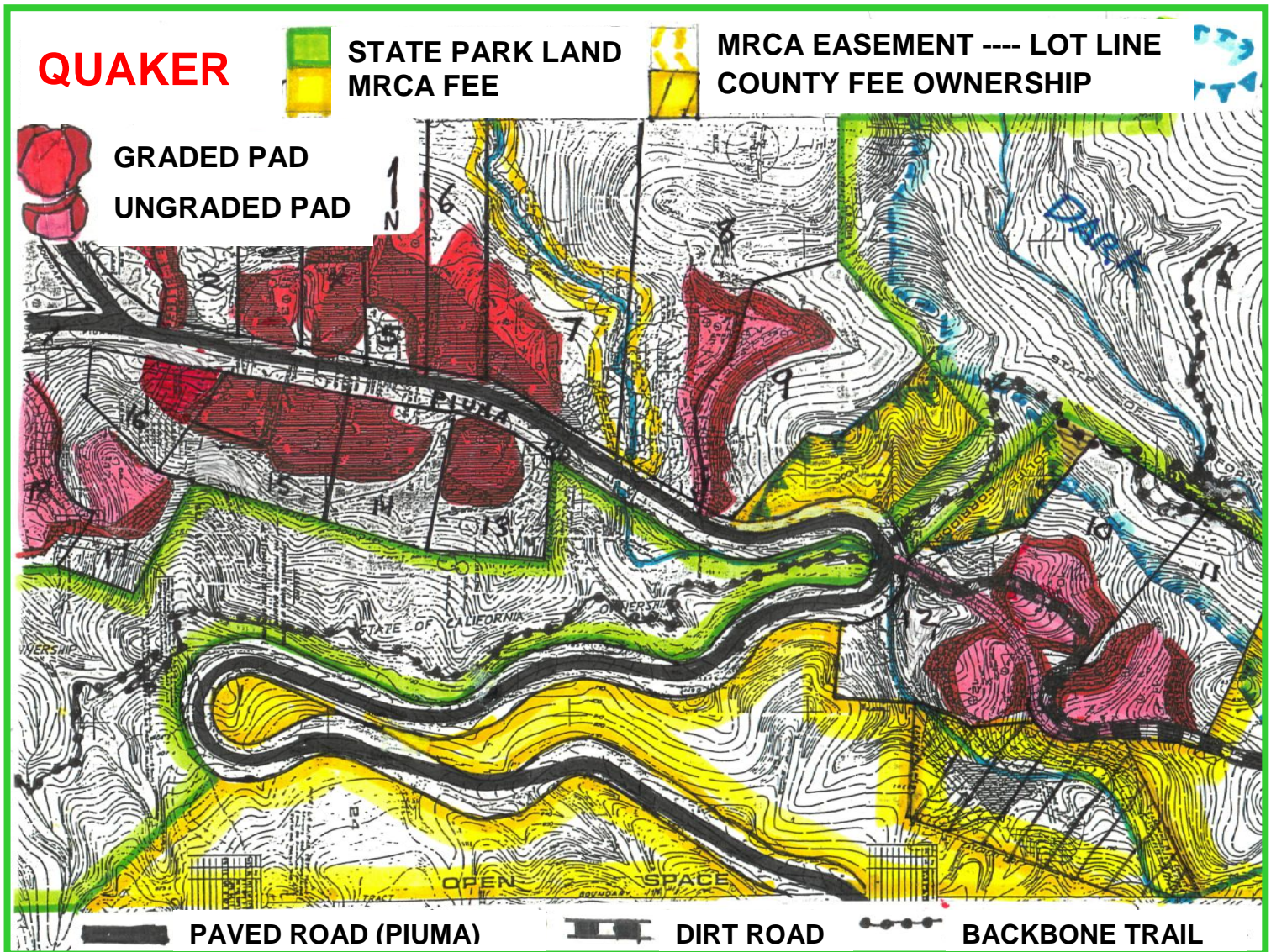


horse park development at Ford Ord in Monterey which encompasses a reported equestrian sports center, 730 homes, a 6,500 seat arena, offices, 400 apartments and a 200-room hotel.

Stay tuned for future updates on the potential awakening of this 30-year old tract in Monte Nido...we will be watching.

Preservation of this irreplaceable viewshed of oak savannahs & sandstone peaks is paramount.

MAP OF THE 30 YEAR OLD - QUAKER-ROSS SUBDIVISION AREA IN MONTE NIDO



QUEST RANCH IN FORECLOSURE

Apparently, the Quest Ranch property at 4001 Topanga Canyon Boulevard is in foreclosure.

In 2010, the owners proposed a massive, 285-bed assisted living facility on the site that consisted of four three-story buildings, each one 35 feet tall; along with underground parking for 231 cars and additional above-ground parking for 79 cars; and a network of driveways, roads, parking areas and sidewalks. The project also called for the removal of 94 oak trees, and 277,000 cubic yards of grading.

BOZAJIAN QUASHES CALABASAS OWTS ORDINANCE

Is it really over?

After a long and disgraceful battle against its 127 septic owners championed by former Mayor Barry Groveman, Calabasas City Council in a unanimous vote on February 8, finally repealed the City's draconian OWTS Ordinance.

To say we all breathed a collective sigh of relief would be putting it mildly. More accurately, it was unabashed elation that permeated the Council Chambers that evening and afterwards too...that is, until residents soon realized that it really might not be *quite* over yet.

Before we go to that potentially disconcerting plateau though, we need to give credit where credit is due and that goes unequivocally to Calabasas Mayor James Bozajian. Mayor Bozajian was the driving force behind rescinding the OWTS Ordinance. Right from the get-go and from the ordinance's controversial adoption, he was the stalwart defender of the residents against the punitive regulation. He also gave a very eloquent and moving speech to the community at the Council meeting. He apologized to his constituents for the City's actions and asked for their forgiveness.

"It was vindicating – yet a bittersweet night," Old Topanga's HOA president, Jody Thomas said.

Honorable mention for her relentless efforts on behalf of Calabasas OWTS residents also goes to new Council member Lucy Martin. She's a breath of fresh air – and an indomitable voice for her constituents. Kudos to Council member Mary Sue Maurer whose voice and votes did not waver in her support for residents versus the OWTS Ordinance either. Council members Bozajian and Maurer along with the city's OWTS owners in Old Topanga, Calabasas Highlands, Mulwood's Bird Streets, Cold Creek and others, together, all took the brunt of Mayor Groveman's wrath for opposing his OWTS tactics.

Mayor Bozajian has had to spend much of his term as Mayor now trying to clean-up the mess left behind by his predecessor, and we can't imagine it's been easy. Mr. Groveman and his supporters, former Council members Dennis Washburn and Jonathon Wolfson are both gone now too, but the negative impacts of their collective actions linger on....and the OWTS Ordinance is a classic example. It was these three that supported pushing forth a totally unnecessary multi-million dollar sewer extension into the 39 home Old Topanga rural neighborhood. Many believe it was developer driven.

So, what happens now? The OWTS Ordinance has given the once-highly regarded city a black eye across the state. Hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars (yes, you read that correctly) have been **squandered** on legal fees and consultant fees in just three

short years, never mind the costs associated with thousands of hours of wasted staff time.

Let's not forget the casualties of this fiasco either, real people and real lives that have been irrevocably changed forever. Older, long time residents like Chet Allen (now deceased), Bob Hahn, and Lloyd Smith, to name a few.

So, although the Ordinance is rescinded, as certain Code enforcement cases against OWTS residents continue, so does the cost factor and the emotional toll continue to escalate as well.

OBAMA PROPOSES LAND ACQUISITION FUNDS FOR SANTA MONICAS

Thirty-five years ago the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* ran a magnificent, full page color photo of Pioma Ridge and Malibu Canyon under the heading of "Last Chance for a Wild, Wonderful World".

By then it had been twelve years since Sue Nelson and several other Brentwood residents had first suggested that Congress should establish a National Park in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Over the years there hadn't been much media interest in the idea of a Great Park or any other park in the Santa Monica Mountains, and the media didn't pay much attention to Sue Nelson's proposal, either. In those days the media and most elected officials were more interested in promoting growth in "The Hills" than in preserving them for public enjoyment.

In fact, in those days few people who didn't actually live there were even aware of the majestic beauty of the Santa Monica Mountains. The great majority of the Los Angeles population lived in urban areas of the Valley and the Westside and had little chance to get to know the scenic mountains and canyons between the 101 Freeway and Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) because almost all that land was privately owned by developers, subdividers, and real estate investors who bristled at any talk about the State buying them out.

Just about the only park in the Santa Monica Mountains thirty-five years ago was Tapia County Park, and LVMWD had made Tapia Park less attractive to the public by building the Tapia Treatment Plant, with its sounds, odors, and effluent discharges next to the creek where children waded and splashed.

Malibu Creek State Park was still "Century Ranch", a private movie ranch closed to the public, as was Paramount Ranch. The State had just bought Trippett Ranch, the first installment of Topanga State Park, but had turned around and leased it to one of the

biggest developers in the Mountains, who proceeded to use it as his personal horse ranch.

But, by the 1960's, more and more people were moving into scenic mountain communities like Brentwood, Topanga, and Monte Nido, while others were taking a closer look at the scenery when they drove through the deep gorge of Malibu Canyon on the way to the beach. Before long there were others beginning to dream Sue Nelson's impossible dream.

Then, in 1976, Congressman Tony Beilenson introduced legislation in Congress proposing the creation of a "Santa Monica Mountains and Seashore National Park". Congress didn't grab on to that idea at first, but Tony kept at it, making the park his highest legislative priority.

By 1978, Tony Beilenson had managed to get Public Law 95-625, the Omnibus Bill, establishing the "Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area", passed by the House of Representatives, but the bill stalled in the Senate, and, with Congress about to adjourn, time was running out. That was the meaning of the large photo and its caption in the *Los Angeles Times* magazine that fall.

On the evening of October 12, 1978, with Congress set to adjourn in just a couple of days, and with the Omnibus Bill still stalled in the Senate, a very anxious group of park supporters met in an office in West Los Angeles to figure out how to persuade the Senate to adopt Public Law 95-625 .

As the evening dragged on with no word from Washington, tension built up in the room. Then, about 9:30, when most of us had given up hope and were getting ready to go home, the pay phone in the hall suddenly rang. We all looked at each other, too nervous to get up to answer it at first. Then Margot Feuer got up, walked out to the hall, and returned a few minutes later.

That late-night call on the pay phone in the hall was from Congressman Tony Beilenson's office in Washington, letting us know that Public Law 95-625 had just passed the Senate. For the first time it looked like the "wild, wonderful world" of the Santa Monica Mountains, might have a future, after all.

Development interests, which had blocked creation of the Park for years, were taken by surprise, but rallied quickly and sent off a blizzard of letters and telegrams urging President Carter to veto Public Law 95-625. It was too late. On November 10, 1978 President Jimmy Carter signed Public Law 95-625. The legislation authorized creation of a 153,075 acre outer protection boundary that took in most of the Mountains from the 405 Freeway west to Point Mugu, along with Cheeseboro and Palo Comado canyons north of the Freeway.

But in 1978 almost none of the land within the outer protection boundary of the new park belonged to the Federal Government; it was private property subject to whatever zoning and development plans its owners and the local authorities were willing to allow - and that was usually quite a bit. The creation of a national park didn't make much of an impression on these folks at first.

For example, The Park Service wanted to purchase the old Sampo Ranch in the upper Las Virgenes Valley and turn it into the main visitor center for the park, but the developer, Currey-Riach, had already filed plans with the County for a zone change and tract map that would allow 1100 homes and condominiums and over a million square feet of commercial floor space on their Lost Hills property, and that's what the Board of Supervisors eventually approved.

Another possible site for the visitor center was the old Claretville property at Las Virgenes and Mulholland (now King Gillette). It had been purchased by an outfit known as the Church Universal and Triumphant, which had announced plans to build a large city on the site.

The Park Service also had its eyes set on Paramount Ranch, where Richard Mark had already filed a zone change with the County to build a tract of 300 homes, while Oren Realty was planning to build 1700 condominiums, a shopping center, and an industrial park in place of the great oaks in Cheeseboro Canyon.

Buying the Land

While most of our great national parks (Yellowstone, etc.) were created out of lands that were already owned by the Federal Government, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area has had to be purchased one piece at a time from private owners - many of them developers - who had become used to looking on their land as a business investment and a source of personal profit.

The money to buy the land that would become this "Great Park" in the Santa Monica Mountains would have to be assembled from scratch out of whatever funds Congress could be persuaded to appropriate each year from the Land and Water Conservation Fund - a special fund financed by revenue from consumptive uses (mining, grazing, oil drilling, etc.) on federal lands.

With one stroke of the pen, Congress had authorized the creation of the world's largest urban national park, but yet to be determined was how Congress was going to be able to come up with the money to buy more than a small fraction of the 153,705 acres within the outer protection boundary established by Public Law 95-625.

Public Law 95-625 had authorized the Secretary of the Interior to spend a total of \$155 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to purchase land for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, but each annual appropriation first had to be approved by Congress in that year's federal budget, and the Santa Monica Mountains had to compete for that money with supporters of many other parks and other federal projects throughout the country that lobbied each year for the limited budget allocation of Land And Water Conservation fund money.

Because of the intense development pressure on potential park acquisitions, Tony Beilenson and other park supporters urged Congress to make the \$155 million in authorized land acquisition money available over the next five years.

The Park Service spent the first year of the park drawing up the required Land Protection Plan that listed the properties that it had determined were its highest priorities

for acquisition. When Congress began to make funds available, they were used to purchase key properties listed in the Land Protection Plan. These properties included Paramount Ranch, Rancho Sierra Vista in Ventura County, and Diamond X.

Land acquisition seemed to be going smoothly at first. In 1980 the Park Service received an appropriation of \$20 million from Congress and entered into negotiations to purchase the Sampo Ranch (Lost Hills) property in the upper Las Virgenes Valley.

But the political climate in Washington soon changed dramatically. Ronald Reagan took office as President in 1981 and appointed James Watt as his Secretary of the Interior. Watt turned out to be radically opposed to parks in general and the Santa Monica Mountains in particular. The negotiations for Sampo Ranch were terminated, and most of the \$20 million in land acquisition funds already appropriated by Congress was reverted back to the treasury, leaving the Park Service with no funds to buy land for the next several years.

The same development interests who had opposed establishment of the Park in the first place now moved in for the kill. James Watt and his developer friends lobbied in Washington for the complete de-authorization of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (i.e. to repeal Public Law 95-625 and terminate the park.)

At one point park opponents – possibly with Watt’s encouragement – even called in the FBI, accusing the Park Service of depriving Santa Monica Mountains landowners of their “rights”. For a short time all Park Service files were sealed by the FBI. Though that restriction was soon lifted, land acquisition funds for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area dried up, and no park land was purchased for the next several years.

By 1985 Congress had begun to loosen the purse strings a little and had resumed buying land for the park, but a great deal of momentum had been lost. The County had approved the Lost Hills development and Currey Riach had begun grading the building sites that would later become Archstone and Deer Springs, precluding any purchase of Sampo Ranch by the Park Service.

Still hoping to acquire land that could become the main visitor center for the park, the Park Service entered into negotiations with the Church Universal and Triumphant for the old Claretville Seminary property, but the Church Universal continued to resist selling to the Park Service. Then, just as it seemed their resistance was weakening a new organization named “Soka” paid the inflated price of \$15 million for the Church Universal property, setting in motion a major land use conflict that would eventually draw in Monte Nido and the rest of the Federation, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the Sierra Club in a 25-year-long legal battle.

During Bill Clinton’s presidency in the 1990’s less and less money was allocated from the Land and Water Conservation Fund with each passing year, and, by 1998, the federal money available to buy park land in the Santa Monica Mountains had once more dried up almost completely. Conditions were even worse under George Bush, when Land and Water Conservation Fund money was diverted to funding other, non-park, government programs and to funding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since the 1990's Congress has appropriated no new federal money to purchase new Park Service lands for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The major park purchases in the last fifteen years (Ahmanson Ranch, Soka) have been made with state bond money rather than federal Land and Water Conservation funds. With the state in a budget crisis, state funds have now also dried up, limiting the ability of both State and federal park agencies to save additional land and complete the Land Protection Plan for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

If you look at a map of land owned by state and federal park agencies in the Santa Monicas today, much of it looks like so much Swiss cheese, riddled with inholdings or in small publicly-owned fragments scattered among large areas of private holdings.

Of the land within the outer protection boundary of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area established by Congress in 1978, almost half - about 70,000 acres - are still private land zoned for private development. The National Park Service owns about 23,000 acres. 35,000 acres are included in Topanga, Malibu Creek, Leo Carrillo, and Point Mugu state parks. Almost 20,000 acres belong to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Over 2000 acres belong to the Mountains Restoration Trust. The remaining lands belong to Los Angeles County and City, Calabasas, and UCLA.

Today many of those "Swiss Cheese inholdings" are undeveloped and right now don't look very different from the park lands around them, but there is one important difference. The "Swiss Cheese" inholdings and other scenic, undeveloped areas within that "outer protection boundary" belong to private citizens who bought them with the idea of eventually subdividing or developing them, and the County and the Coastal Commission have recognized that by adopting zoning codes and coastal development plans that recognize those owners' constitutional rights to grade and develop those privately-owned properties.

As long as those landowners of "swiss cheese inholdings" with exceptionally high scenic or natural habitat value are willing to leave their properties undeveloped and continue paying property taxes on them, we can continue to enjoy their natural beauty, but, as soon as an owner decides to exercise his right to develop his property, we'd better have the cash in hand to buy him out or accept the loss and degradation of that part of the park to mansions, subdivisions, and graded pads, access roads, and driveways, as we've already had to accept the loss of Sampo Ranch, Archstone, the ridgetop houses on Saddle Peak and the rim of Malibu Canyon, and many of what were once the most scenic parts of the Mulholland Corridor.

The Supreme Court will not permit us to deny the owners of these "Swiss Cheese" inholdings the right to develop something on their private property under the prevailing zoning. The only way to stop that development of sensitive private lands within the Park is for Congress to continue make the money available to the Park Service to buy those critical inholdings that are threatened by development. If enough Land and Water Conservation Fund money isn't allocated to the Park Service and other park agencies

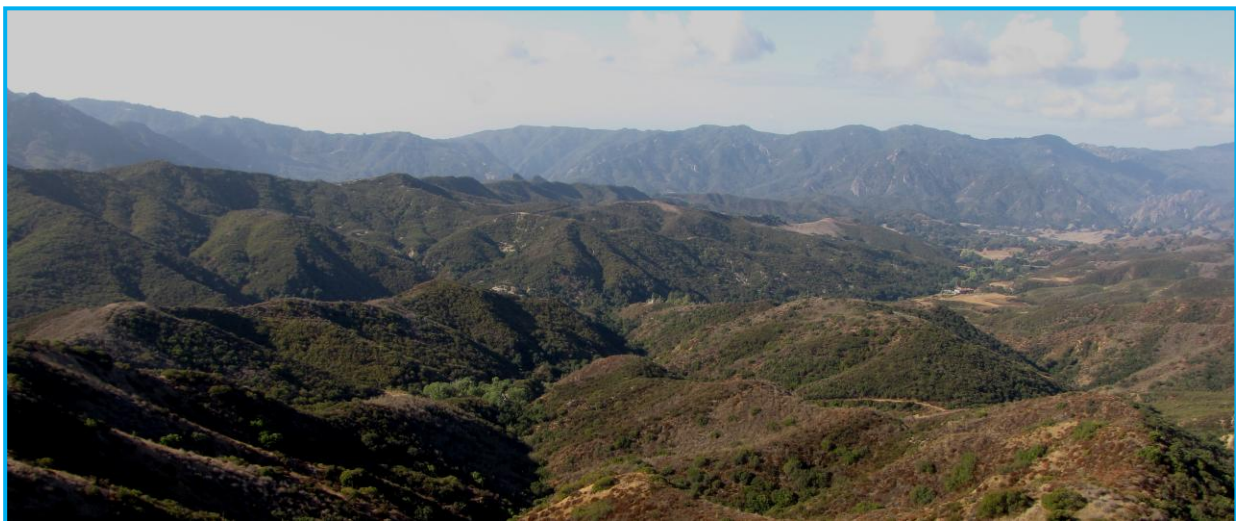
by Congress at a rate sufficient to buy out the most critical and threatened properties, more and more of what was to have been the “Great Park” in the Santa Monica Mountains will be degraded by unsightly ridgetop mansions, graded roads and pads, and tract developments.

The member of Congress who is today trying to fill the shoes of Tony Beilenson, the “father” of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, is Congressman Brad Sherman. Sherman has persuaded the Obama Administration to include \$2.4 million in the Fiscal Year 2013 Budget to enable the Park Service to acquire and protect an additional 238 acres of land mostly “Swiss Cheese” private inholdings in rugged, scenic Zuma and Trancas Canyons just off Kanan Dume Road, but Sherman’s office has indicated some of the \$2.4 million could also be used to purchase very scenic wilderness land on the north slope of Castro Peak just west of Malibu Lake.

President Obama’s proposal for \$2.4 million in federal land acquisition funds for the Santa Monica Mountains in next year’s federal budget is one of only six nationwide acquisition priorities in the Obama Administration’s budget and the only proposed Park Service acquisition in California this year.

Though \$2.4 million to buy up to 238 acres is not a large enough appropriation, it does represent the first serious National Park Service land acquisition appropriation proposal in the last fifteen years.

It’s going to be up to a particularly contentious, unpopular Congress to decide whether the \$2.4 million in President Obama’s Draft 2013 Budget becomes available to the National Park Service to buy up to 238 acres of rugged, scenic Zuma Canyon or whether, once again, Congress will “zero out” the Santa Monica Mountains’ land acquisition budget and leave almost 70,000 acres of potential parkland waiting for the bulldozers.



Sweeping view of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area from the New Millenium Trail.

LOOMING STRUCTURES IMPACT OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Who's Putting Up Those Ugly Buildings?

My neighbor came over yesterday. I could tell he was really upset about something. In fact he was steaming and fuming "Have you seen it?" he said. "What?" I replied. "That awful building." "What building?" "You know. That huge, square, windowless one next to the High School. How could you miss it? It's a big, city-type building in our rural neighborhood. It's really ugly! Darn those developers and the City for letting them build it!"

Well, it sure wasn't the City of Calabasas or the City of Agoura Hills that let anyone build *them*. Not one, but two, enormous concrete **Performing Arts Centers** located at Agoura Hills and Calabasas High Schools respectively. No, these buildings are the handiwork of the Las Virgenes Unified School District, all on its own.

How you may ask is that possible? LVUSD is **not** required to go through the planning process or obtain permits in either city. They do not have to conform to city codes, city ordinances or generate an EIR that analyzes in great detail the impacts of the project. The school district can basically build what it wants in its own jurisdiction. Just because it can however doesn't mean it should have. Clearly, neither of these two oversized blocks (size or design) would have made it past the Planning Commission in either city.



The Performing Arts Center at Agoura Hills High School as it appears from the street (Driver Avenue).





The Performing Arts Center in Calabasas on the Scenic Corridor.

Significant viewshed impact of the Calabasas Performing Arts Center from the Santa Monica Mountains.



So, what exactly are the Performing Arts Centers? According to LVUSD's promotional material, "these cultural hubs will be dynamic venues for arts, education and community participation, providing state-of-the-art performance space for students, **professionals** and the community".

They feature:

- a 650 seat main stage theater
- a 100 seat secondary theater
- full orchestra pit with hydraulic lift
- professional acoustics, lighting and sound systems
- high quality dressing rooms, scene shop, costume shop and green room
- full fly gallery and rear projection capability
- concession and café areas

It is admirable that our school district is invested in promoting the performing arts for our students. As they point out, "at a time when many school districts are making deep cuts in the arts, the Las Virgenes Unified School District is purposefully investing in them. LVUSD's theater, music and dance programs engage thousands of students from elementary, middle and high school each year in the performing arts, making the Las Virgenes Unified School District one of the most sought-after public school systems in the region."

Obviously, these huge, high tech centers are exceedingly impressive, “beacons for the arts” as LVUSD calls them, and not just for our kids. While we obviously want the best for our students; we wonder how much of a commercial, profit generating center they are meant to become? LVUSD has already hired a booker to book events and clearly they aim to promote and fill their theaters with bodies.

Commercial centers of this size constructed in the middle of rural residential areas with no mitigation? Shouldn't the surrounding communities have been an integral part of the process? The School Board approved these projects without being required to evaluate the impacts of the project on traffic, lights, noise, parking capacity, storm runoff, scenic resources and fire hazards.



The Agoura Hills Performing Arts Center appears to lean over onto Driver Avenue.

In Agoura Hills, the PAC building is leaning over, almost into the street (Driver Avenue) and it dwarfs the other buildings that make up Agoura Hills High School. One resident told us that every day when he rides his bike past that wall, he feels like the building is going to fall on him. It sits at the entrance to the rural community of Old Agoura. Two flashing electronic billboards already flank both sides of that entrance.



In Calabasas, the PAC dwarfs the other buildings too at Calabasas High and sits right on top of a designated scenic corridor – Mulholland Highway. This will impact adjacent communities of Greater Mulwood, Old Topanga, Calabasas Village, Calabasas Highlands, Cold Creek, etc. and many more. Mulholland is the only access for communities flanking that corridor. Where will excess parking go if rumors are true that the

School Board is renegeing on building a parking structure on site?

The Performing Arts Centers, regardless, are a done deal. So, be that as it may, we now need to look to the future and work closely with LVUSD to mitigate the neighborhood impacts and issues, particularly parking. How can we support our PAC's and how can they support the surrounding communities? Let's focus on finding mutually beneficial, creative solutions.

Construction of the Performing Arts Centers was funded by the LVUSD Measure G bond. They are scheduled for completion by the end of 2012.



Performing Arts Center Agoura Hills High School



Performing Arts Center Calabasas High School

SENATOR PAVLEY TO HOST SENIOR SCAM STOPPER SEMINAR

Senator Fran Pavley will be hosting an important, **Senior Scam Stopper** seminar, in partnership with the California Contractors State License Board on Friday, March 9, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Seniors, their families, and caregivers are welcome to attend this two hour seminar to learn from experts how to protect themselves from fraud relating to home repair, insurance, finances, identity theft, and more.

When: Friday, March 9, 2012
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Where: City of Westlake Village Council
Council Chambers
31200 Oak Crest Drive
Westlake Village, CA 91361



SENIOR **Scam Stopper** SEMINAR