Public Comments on proposed Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project

*Marie Baker*: Opposed to bulldozing Wetlands, we’re taking their habitat.

*Jane Velez-Mitchell, News Reporter*: Opposes the project and the notion that in order to restore something
You have to demolish it.

*Neysa Frechette, Manager of science programs Friends of Ballona Wetlands*: requested to come before PLUC with a presentation.

*Lisa Karlan*: Leave this remaining piece of nature and wildlife alone. Money, lawyers, sleek presentations will try to convince you.

*Edith Read, Manager freshwater marsh, Friends of Ballona Wetlands*: Requested to come before PLUC and present.

*Marc Saltzberg*: EIR problem. Project would last from 2024-2033. By the time 2100 rolls around the project won’t be around because sea level rise will have destroyed it.

*Anne Kirkpatrick*: Gas Co. facility is another Aliso Canyon waiting to happen. Animals will die because of the project. Shut down the gas storage facility.

*Scott Culbertson, Friends of Ballona Wetlands*: requested to present to PLUC.

*Armaita May*: Veterinarian. Project will displace thousands of animals that are supposed to be protected by the Army Corps of Engineers.

*Susanne Cumming*: EIR has some deep flaws, should be withdrawn.

*Robert Roy Vanderhook, Biologist*: Opposes the bulldozing and the project as proposed.

*Brad Zacuto*: Opposes destruction of current fresh water Wetlands and favors full removal of the So Cal Gas Co from Playa del Rey.

*Molly Basler, Climate Reality Project*: project is fraudulent, extinction of the climate crisis. Wants So Cal Gas out of the state.

*Pat Allinson*: Would like to refer us to the Del Rey Neighborhood Council comment letter.

*Alyson Burton & John Flores*: Leave our Wetlands alone. Don’t bulldoze the Wetlands and tread lightly on such a precious resource.

*Cindy Rosene, School Conductor of Wetlands tours*: Lots of life, it never connected to the sea, flooding it would not be natural. There’s freshwater present. In favor of hand restoration.

*Dhun May*: Very expensive, not much public input, cause a decade of disruption to the community.

*Walter Lamb, Ballona Wetlands Land Trust*: Management of the plan is a mess. After 8 years and $6.2 million they’ve used the wrong flood plain as their basis. Why aren’t we looking to have access now? We were always supposed to have access. Requested to present to PLUC.

*Jonathon Coffin, Wetlands photographer*: Been photographing the Wetlands for 17 years. Area A needs more love. Restricted from going into Area A.
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Member of Protect Playa Now
2/18/2020

Protect Playa Now, a local environmental group of Playa del Rey, opposes the FEIR for the so-called "Restoration" Plan for the Ballona Wetlands. It is fraudulent. The reconfiguration from a seasonal freshwater wetland to a saltwater wetland masked as a "restoration" is a shocking refusal of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to honor their spelled out 1980 Code which says: "The State of California is to Protect Threatened and Endangered Native Plants and Wildlife..."
NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
PLANNING & LAND USE COMMITTEE

Feb. 18, 2020

President Obama once spoke of “professional activists who profit from conflict.” That’s what you’re seeing here this evening.

Under the name of Wetlands Action Network, which has had its non-profit status revoked by the IRS, here are some samples of Hanscom’s obstruction and downright contradictions:

First, they advocated for just opening the tide gates and letting water flow freely into the wetland, their biologist, Roy Van de Hoek, insisting it would not flood Culver Blvd. From past experience, we know better. Now, in a complete turnaround since the State purchase, it’s “No Bulldozers”! We’re supposed to restore with pails and shovels???

They opposed designating Ballona as an Ecological Reserve because they knew it would prevent them from indiscriminate planting and chopping.

They opposed our dunes project which has brought back the El Segundo blue butterfly, an endangered species, as well as replacing weeds and ice plant with native dune plants. All with volunteer help. They also harassed our tours and work parties until Hanscom and Van de Hoek were banned from the wetlands.

They opposed the freshwater marsh, filing a lawsuit that delayed it for over a year. The marsh, created with those villainous bulldozers, now supports more species than all the rest of Ballona.

They opposed the installation of new tide gates which allowed more water into Ballona, increasing the endangered Belding's Savannah Sparrow population for the first time since record-keeping began. In opposing, they made scurrilous accusations that the project was a
nefarious plot to destroy the wetlands even claiming the landowner would use herbicides to kill wetland wildlife.

They nearly scuttled the State purchase by publishing a snide email that said:

“If a fair price is not what arises from the appraisal, we will have to wonder about the relationship of Trust for Public Land’s real estate sales commission (would you rather get 12% of $125 million or 12% of $6 million?) as well as Playa Vista’s top lawyer’s involvement (an advisory board member of TPL) to the ultimate proposed deal.”

Now, under the name of the Ballona Institute, which has also had its non-profit status revoked, they continue a campaign of falsehoods and disastrously wrong science. And no doubt they’ll be raising funds to file a lawsuit.

It’s the Gas Company this time. Contrary to what you’ve been hearing, the EIR specifically says: “The restoration alternatives propose to remove wells from within the Ballona Reserve and to relocate some out of the reserve. No expansion or upgrade, and no new type of operation, is included in the proposal.”

Pay attention to facts, folks. If you think my comments need validation, I have a little black briefcase out there and after the show, I’d be happy to provide proof of everything I’ve said.

We, who almost destroyed it, owe this place. Let’s get started on restoration. Bring back Ballona.

Ruth Lansford
Good evening. My name is David Kay and I live in Playa Vista.

Fish and Wildlife's plan for Ballona is extraordinary, ambitious, expensive, and is the only plan that accomplishes all of the goals set for Ballona after 18 years and counting of expert studies, exhaustive stakeholder engagement and public dialogue. Any other choice falls short and is settling for half a loaf. I urge you all to not only support, but to actively advocate for the Department's plan.

This project is a very big deal, for our neighborhood and region, and deserves the most careful consideration by you and every other decision maker who will weigh in over the next several years. Please take your time, and thoroughly fact check public statements made here tonight.

Twelve years ago, bulldozers moved two million cubic yards of dirt to restore 440 acres of wetlands, upland habitat and build public trails near Del Mar for a project called San Dieguito. Wetlands there were gradually filled in over a century to make them useful for other things, supported by federal policies at the time. Filled in by an airfield, roads, a railroad and a fairgrounds, San Dieguito had everything in common with the Ballona of today and so is one of many excellent case studies for how the Department's Ballona project will proceed here.

Five years ago, State Parks took bulldozers to Malibu Lagoon, transforming an infilled, degraded and stagnant marsh into 21 acres of lush wetland habitat with improved public access.

And today, in Encinitas, bulldozers are working yet another 600-acre wetland restoration at the local San Elijo Lagoon, and building new trails for the neighborhood.

I believe nothing could inform your decision-making about Ballona more richly than learning the experiences of the people in those neighborhoods. So, I urge you to contact your local government counterparts in the cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach, Encinitas and Malibu. Call or write any current or former councilmember of those towns and ask them how their projects turned out. Visit the sites and see for yourself. All of these projects, and dozens of others along the coast were
constructed just as is proposed for Ballona and all blessed by our Coastal Commission. Ballona just happens to be among the last.

Someone always disagrees with the outcome of any large project planning process. That's no reason to hit the brakes and throw it all out. The state exhaustively analyzed 13 different approaches to restoring Ballona. The one presented by Mr. Brody is the stand-out best.

Opponents who have neither the facts nor law on their side always resort to pounding on the table. You've already heard and will continue to hear what I know to be fictional narratives propagated by opponents to the Department's plan. They say it will kill thousands of sensitive plants and animals, will harm the public health, destroy groundwater resources, create a Disneyland amusement park, cause a methane explosion apocalypse and unleash a flood of biblical proportions, washing Playa Del Rey into the sea. It's all just table-pounding.

They'll also say it's too expensive. Not for Los Angeles, it's not. We're the greatest city on the entire Pacific Rim. Eight million people live in the region and 2.8 million within a short drive of Ballona. We here in the neighborhood, your constituents, want and deserve the best. Fish and Wildlife and all state taxpayers want to build us a safe, clean, high performing and luxurious supercar. The opponents just want to throw a new coat of paint on an old Volvo, one that handles poorly, has no airbags, gets bad gas mileage and pollutes the air.

Sure, the supercar version of Ballona is expensive and it will take longer. So was San Dieguito, Malibu and so is San Elijo, so was the Mars rover, our Metro Rail expansions, our interstate highways, water supply projects and every other public benefit project we've undertaken. We shouldn't ever settle for the old Volvo. President John F. Kennedy said it best. "We choose to do this and all of the other things ....you know the rest." Thank you.

NCWPDR Comments David W. Kay 02/18/2020
Thank you for the opportunity to speak, the public’s voice should be heard, more importantly, we speak on nature’s behalf.

You will no doubt hear opposing views and opinions on this topic of restoration but as someone who has studied the area for more than ten years on nearly a daily basis, I can say to you with complete confidence that this project would be a disaster for the environment in general and will devastate nearly all of abundant wildlife that lives in the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. Not to mention that it will completely eliminate for many years, a vitally important feeding and resting ground for sensitive migrating birds that return here every year.

I ride my bike to work, which provides me the opportunity of visiting the wetlands twice a day to study and photograph the wetlands. While certain parties are going to make claims about invasive species of plants and degradation due to invasive human activity, the reality is the current state of the wetlands is made up of invasive species that have taken over nearly one hundred years in the making. In reality, nearly the wetlands will return to a very viable wetland and an incredibly valuable ecosystem that is teeming with life.

I have thousands of documentary style photographs of diverse wildlife taken over a decade that proves there is diversity that doesn’t even appear in the EIR, and Jonathan Coffin who spends even more time than I do there has even more documentation than I do. I (WE) can say with complete confidence, and have the documentation to prove that the so-called science performed in preparation for the EIR is seriously flawed. In all the time we have been out there, we have never seen any actual scientist studying anything. The closest thing to it was when they came in with core drills, trampling the sensitive plants, and poked holes in the ground.

Last but certainly not least, there’s something incredibly important that no one seems to be taking into consideration, if they take the levies out to make this meandering creek that will allow full tidal flow into the wetlands, what happens to the tons of trash and millions of gallons of polluted water that enters the creek after each rain? That’s right, it’s all going into the wetlands to poison and kill whatever is left alive after they kill most of what is there now with bulldozers.

No project means hand groomed.

I’m available if you want more information, there is real science available from real citizen scientists and biologists in the community who have valid concerns about this wolf in sheep’s clothing abomination they are masquerading as a restoration.

Thank you again

The wetlands were never full tidal, it was seasonal when rains broke through the sand dune. It should be noted that there were no storm drains from polluted city streets.

The fresh water marsh is not completely successful year-round
1. Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act disallows harming the freshwater aquifers including-
   a. Groundwater protection program under the Safe Drinking Water Act, Section 300 and Title 42 of U.S. Code per Safe Drinking Water Act
   b. Water quality control standards per Federal Water Pollution Control Act

2. Groundwater Protection Act & Sustainable Groundwater Management Act disallow harm to the groundwater volumes and quality.
   a. To promote groundwater conservation and protect groundwater resources and recharge zones. 10727.4 (a) Control of saline water intrusion.

   a. Disallows groundwater from being discharged without use to the ocean. State Board intends to use its authority under the Water Codes to assure that both misuse of water supply does not occur and that reasonable protection of beneficial uses of water continues.