

DRAFT EIR/EIS COMMENT FORM

DUE OCTOBER 7, 1996 4:30 PM

Name: Phil Trowbridge Date: 9-24-96
 Address: 1474 So. Fitch M. Rd.
 City: Healdsburg State: Ca Zip: 95448
 Phone: (707) 433-5241
707 544-7194

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Please fill out the above and provide your written comments about the Draft EIR/EIS in the space provided below. You may add additional pages if needed. Please write legibly. If you prefer to type your comments on a separate page, please attach to this form. Where possible, please reference the page to which the comment refers. When you have completed your comments, please fold the form so the City's address is showing, tape the edges together, (Do not use staples), and place in the mail.

the Fear mongers need to become responsible. 001
 their heads are stuck in the toilet, let the citizens
 representatives make a responsible decision and
 not get on with our lives and get back to enjoying
 our fellow Sonoma County residents.
 The regional sewer district managers have provided
 adequate review, adequate public input, and
 responsible review by the acknowledged experts.
 The alternatives have been adequately reviewed and
 give the managing authorities reasonable methods
 to effectively make use of the wastewater at responsible 002
 times during the different seasons of the year.
 Additional wetland enhancement and marsh
 development will be available to study on an
 ongoing basis in the future (See Outdoor
 California Magazine article on the "Secrets
 of Hidden Valley") (Do a study like this for the laguna.)

The Secrets of Hidden Valley

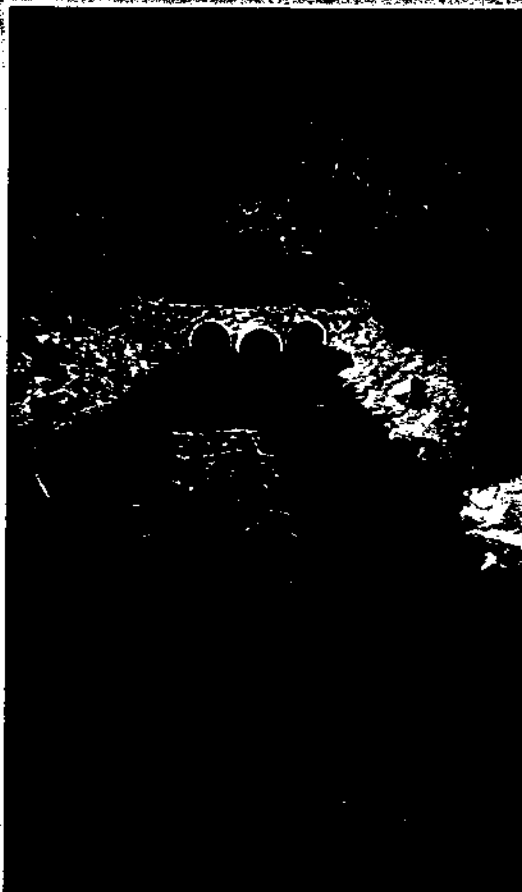
By James Davis

The Hidden Valley Wildlife Area, located in the bottom lands of the Santa Ana River near the city of Norco in western Riverside County, is unquestionably one of Southern California's hidden treasures. Managed by Riverside County Parks and Open Space District (RCPOSD) under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), the area contains approximately 1,500 acres of state land purchased by the Wildlife Conservation Board in the mid-1970s to preserve riparian wildlife habitat. Several trails have been established, and horseback riding and hiking are two of the favorite recreational activities for this urban wildlife area.

Over 180 species of birds have been documented in the area including the endangered least Bell's vireo and willow flycatcher. In addition to many species of mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians.

Hidden Valley was originally established as a hunting club for stocked pheasants. It was converted to a duck hunting club in the 1960s and over two hundred acres of ponds were created to attract migratory and resident waterfowl. The remaining riverland supported a diverse population of other native wildlife species in a natural wetland ecosystem. By 1994, only about 50 acres of ponds remained due to floods and a lack of reliable water. Habitat degradation had also occurred. Giant cane (*Arundo donax*) had invaded the area and eliminated much of the once lush native riparian willow, cottonwood, and mulefat vegetation.

Water for the ponds had at one time been diverted from the Santa Ana River. More recently it was supplied by tertiary treated effluent from the Riverside Regional Water Quality Control Plant (RWQCP) located just upstream of the wildlife area. The



DFG Photo © James Davis
A series of natural channels feeding water to the wildlife areas were improved and pipelines installed to provide consistent flows to the ponds.

supply was unreliable however, and the remaining ponds often dried up completely or became shallow mosquito breeding grounds.

In 1990 the RWQCP began a series of concept plans and pilot projects to investigate the potential of using the Hidden Valley wetlands for nitrogen removal. Tertiary treated water, though safe to drink, contains higher than normal levels of nitrogen. To remove the nitrogen in order to meet new regulatory requirements for water discharged to the Santa Ana River would cost the City of Riverside residents millions of dollars in plant modifications. Pilot projects had shown that wetlands have the natural

ability to remove nitrogen and upgrade the quality of treated wastewater.

Plants in wetland ecosystems remove nitrogen from the water by absorption. Since the water in wetlands is often shallow there is a higher exchange between the soil and water which helps filter out the nitrogen. In the end, this natural process brings the nitrogen within required limits while the water flows allow wetlands to thrive and grow. Today, as much as 20 million gallons of tertiary treated water can flow through the Hidden Valley area, meeting the needs and requirements of a diverse group of agencies and private individuals while enhancing wildlife habitat.

The City of Riverside applied for and received a \$250,000 grant from the State Resources Agency to proceed with the Santa Ana River Wetland Enhancement Project. A series of natural channels feeding water to the wildlife area were improved, and pipelines were installed to provide consistent flows to the ponds. The project ensured a reliable source of water for Hidden Valley Wildlife Area would be provided.

The Wetland Enhancement Project was completed in late 1994. Between 10 and 12 million gallons of water per day are currently delivered to the wildlife area. Wetland restoration was a major goal. The water has revitalized nine ponds and 70 acres of wetland habitat. Approximately 15 acres of new ponds were constructed in what had been agricultural land and *Arundo* was removed from the entire project site.

So far more than 2,500 young willows, cottonwoods, and mulefat have been planted. This effort will continue for five years to assure that species and age diversity objectives are attained. Removal of the *Arundo* and a constant source of water has allowed

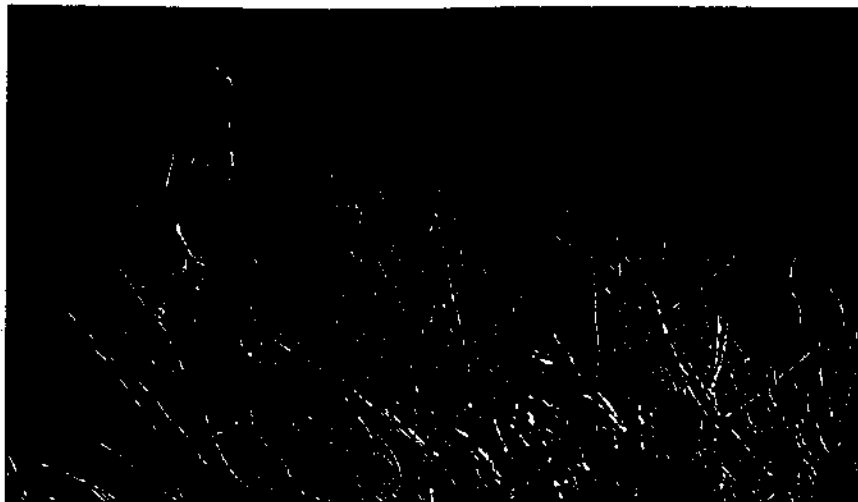


Photo © Ed Ely, Outdoor California Photography Award Program, 1991

A wide variety of birds, including the northern harrier, use the ponds and nest in the surrounding habitat.



Photo © Neil Nagel, Outdoor California Photography Award Program, 1992

The Pacific treefrog is one species that has received benefits from the project.

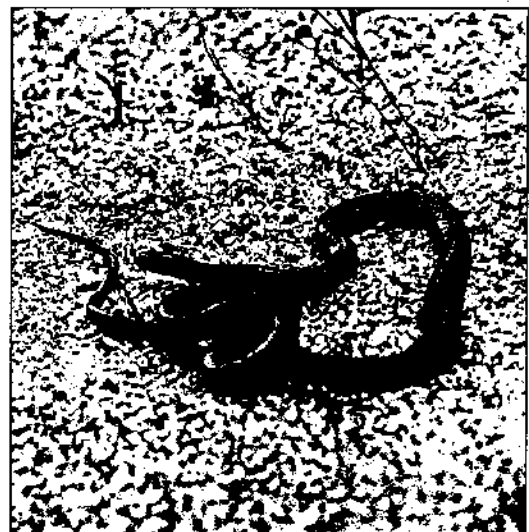


Photo © Bob Barnes, Outdoor California Photography Award Program, 1995

The river area supports a diverse population of wildlife including ringneck snakes.

remaining native vegetation to prosper again. Numerous species of riparian and wetland dependent wildlife have received tremendous benefits from the project.

Opossum, bats, rabbits, mice, coyotes, fox, and bobcat are already using the area. A wide variety of waterfowl, herons, hawks, shorebirds, swallows and songbirds use the ponds and nest in the surrounding revitalized habitat.

A coalition of partners was established to initiate this Wetland Enhancement Project. The City of Riverside was lead agency for the project. Department of Fish and Game,

Riverside Co. Parks and Open Space District, Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as interested members of the public were involved in the conceptual design of the project.

The people of southern California have benefitted the most from this project. The newly revived wildlife area provides many low impact recreational opportunities.

Hiking, picnicking, birdwatching, and wildlife viewing are among these. An active environmental education program for the general public and school groups has been established. Administered by Riverside County

Parks and Open Space District, this program provides educational and interpretive programs in wildlife conservation and water quality.

The Hidden Valley Wetland Enhancement Project provides an example of agencies and the community working together to find equally beneficial solutions to environmental issues. For more information on the area, call Diane Falconer at 909-785-7452.

James Davis is a wildlife biologist with the northern unit of Department of Fish and Game's Region 5.

